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I WAS NO LADY...



JEAN WALKER GODSELL

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I WAS NO LADY . . .

. . . I Followed the Call of the Wild

The Autobiography of a Fur Trader's Wife
Jean W. Godsell *Adopted Chief, Jo-ne-yoh*
(Blue Bird), of the Six Nations Indians,
and Good-Shield-Woman of the Blackfoot Tribe



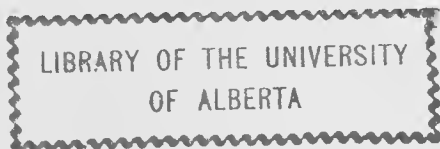
THE RYERSON PRESS ~ TORONTO

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Published 1959

*As a matter of courtesy,
rather than necessity, I considered it
desirable to change some of the names
appearing in this narrative.*



PRINTED AND BOUND IN CANADA
BY THE RYERSON PRESS, TORONTO

*Dedicated to
My husband, Philip, who opened
the door of Adventure for me, and to
whom I shall always be grateful for
making me a part of an era which
will retain its own particular brand
of glamour till the end of Time.*

Introduction

As a friend of thirty years' standing, it gives me great pleasure to write this introduction to Jean Godsell's book. Those of us in the Force who had the honour and pleasure of knowing her in the North, as well as her many other friends, have long hoped she would write up her experiences on the colourful Old North that has passed into the limbo. No woman is better qualified. She learned her North the hard way; travelled by open scow, dodging ice-pans; by dog-team, with the temperature nudging 60° below zero; by pack-train; knew the utter loneliness of the land and, like most of us, knew the meaning of short rations and, at times, the hunger of soul as well as body.

A gracious and immaculate hostess, always full of fun and laughter, and an excellent cook, Jean was known to everyone from Fort McMurray to the Arctic and was more than just a friend—she was an *institution*! Added to this, her homes in the North were always artistic and cosy and reflected her flair for making much out of nothing, an invaluable asset in the North of our era. But, woe to anyone who attempted to take advantage of her good nature and hospitality. They soon realized that her small figure was imbued with a tempestuous Scots temper that would brook no liberties and that, despite her size, she had the courage of a tiger when aroused.

The title of her book is a misnomer for Jean was recognized by every Mounted Policeman, trader, trapper and skinner in the land as, indeed, a lady for she brought to the North all those qualities of good breeding and dignity

which were her birthright whilst, at the same time, brightening the lives of everyone.

Since I was in the country at the same time as Jean, I can attest to the painstaking accuracy and authenticity she has displayed in recording her experiences and the conditions there. The revolutionary changes that were taking place and the bitter hatreds that existed between opposition traders involved Jean in intrigues and difficulties which exist no longer but, at that time, kept many of the settlements and forts in a state of turmoil.

Jean's story is a record of northern Canadian life told by one who learned it by living it, and is a valuable addition to Canadiana.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "G. G. Keenan". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

[Retired]

*Deputy Commissioner
Royal Canadian Mounted Police
Ottawa, Ontario*

February 11, 1959

Foreword

As far back as memory goes my family have played no small part in the making of history, stemming out as they have done from The Laird of Cluny-Macpherson, of the Clan Chattan Confederation who wreaked their own particular brand of havoc amongst Scotland's heather-clad hills, and from a Prince of the Royal House of Denmark. Many have been wanderers, sometimes from choice, sometimes from necessity as, for instance, when they were forced to flee Hawgreen, their castle at Bervie on the east coast of Scotland, through becoming involved in the cause of Bonnie Prince Charlie. One of these self-same Macphersons, finding a price upon his head, skipped to France and cannily changed his name to Walker.

As a child, I listened to fascinating stories related by my maternal grandmother about my forebears, amongst them William Walker, an officer aboard the *Bellerophon* when she carried the exiled Napoleon to St. Helena. Of another who was Master Gunner aboard Nelson's flagship, *Victory*, at the historic Battle of Trafalgar, and of still others who fought at Waterloo, emigrated to Jamaica, to North America, and also harpooned whales in Greenland's icy waters.

Born in Scotland, imbued with the blood of this long line of Danish and Scottish adventurers and wanderers, it wasn't to be wondered at that I found myself thrilling to the spirit of adventure as I floated north in an open scow through ice-filled waters to pursue my own true destiny in the Canadian North as the bride of an official of The Adventurers of England Trading into Hudson Bay — more prosaically known as the Hudson's Bay Company. The lure of the Unknown had caught me also in its spell!

With the passing of the years time has wrought many changes. The picturesque North, with its dog-teams, canoes, sternwheelers, old-time fur traders, trappers and scarlet-coated Mounted Police, which I knew and loved, and which I have endeavoured to depict in the following pages, is no longer a land of isolation, cut off from the Outside for months at a time as was the case in my day. That colourful era has been supplanted by a new race of pioneers who toil and moil, not on webbed snowshoes through snow-blanketed forest aisles in search of silver foxes and other glossy peltries, but with pick and shovel as they wrest gold and other precious metals secreted in the Northland's granite bosom. No longer do lonely exiles depend upon the dog-sled laden with longed-for letters to break the monotony of existence. At all hours of the day the radio broadcasts the latest news to the remotest cabin or camp. No longer do these modern "exiles" have to depend upon their slow-moving dog-teams to make long, cold and wearisome treks to reach the Outside. In a matter of hours, aeroplanes can whisk them to the very heart of civilization or bring in to them supplies and luxuries we of the Old Brigade could only *dream of!*

Despite hardships, intrigue and loneliness the life held many compensations, paramount amongst them being the friendships I formed at remote fur posts and beside campfires on wilderness trails, friendships which have endured and remained steadfast to this very day. For we are a queer breed, we of the Old North. We clasp to our bosoms with hoops of steel those who have been tried and proven true.

JEAN WALKER GODSELL

1730-14th Avenue, S.W.
Calgary, Alberta
February 15th, 1959

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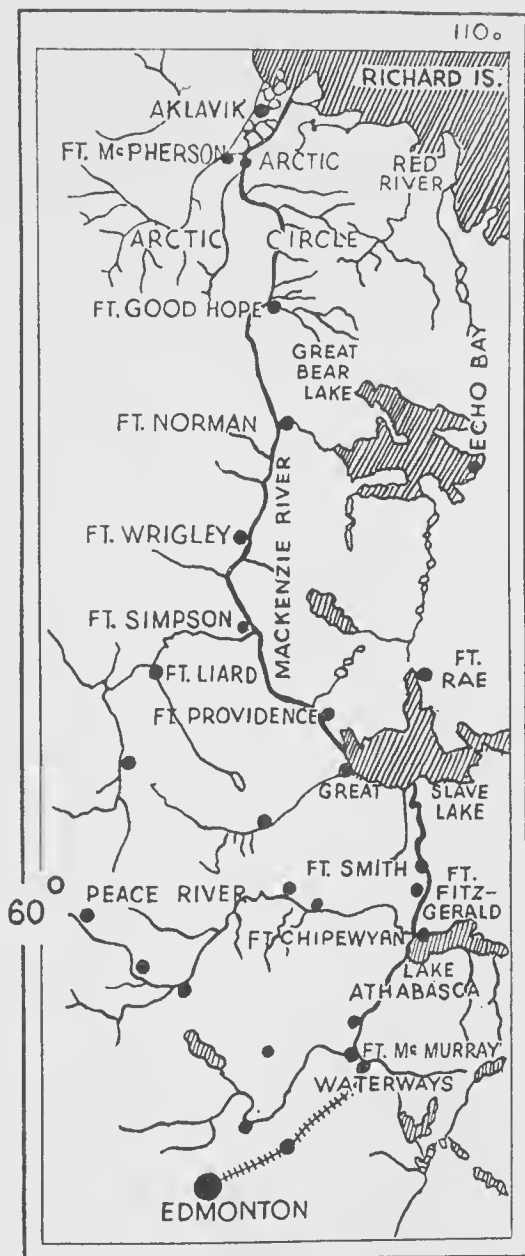
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I WAS NO LADY . . .



Map showing author's travels from Edmonton, Alberta, to the Polar Sea.

1.

A Hangman and a Honeymoon

When I boarded the old *Muskeg Limited* at Dunvegan Yards near Edmonton, Alberta, in the fall of 1921, I little realized what an adventurous and colourful life I was stepping into.

As the rickety train with its string of rusty-red boxcars wheezed and groaned along its serpentine course through the dreary muskegs twixt Edmonton and the end-of-steel, near Fort McMurray, I gazed around the antiquated coach with its slatted, wooden seats and garish, brass coal-oil lamps which swayed drunkenly to and fro overhead. All around me were grizzled trappers and buckskin-coated fur traders whose shining eyes and boisterous laughter denoted they were still feeling the effects of their parting drinks before leaving the "bright lights"; a couple of soft-spoken nuns, a solemn priest, a tall rangy Mounted Policeman named "Slim" MacDonald whose craggy face bore an infectious, good-natured smile; Colonel Walter Hale of the Postal Department in Edmonton who was, later, to be known as the "Flying Postmaster," and a bevy of tartan-clad squaws, their papooses clasped to their breasts, sitting stolidly beside mahogany-faced husbands who puffed incessantly upon odoriferous pipes, their beady eyes missing nothing.

At the far end of the coach, alone and aloof, lounged a

cadaverous, bleary-eyed man in nondescript khaki and battered Stetson who addressed the occasional curt remark to Slim then lapsed into brooding silence.

"*Hangman Ellis* or I'm a Dutchman!" grunted Dr. Ings of Fort McMurray who had adopted me from the moment we were introduced in the Macdonald Hotel in Edmonton a few days before. Formerly House Physician to Queen Liliuokalani of Hawaii, he was charming and gallant to a degree. "Ellis is headed for Fort Smith," he told me, "to officiate at the hanging of Albert Lebeau, a Slavey Indian who killed his squaw last winter for presenting him with an unwanted paleface papoose. Poor Albert! Guilty or not, he has the sympathy of every Northerner!"

"It's Ellis, all right," my husband smiled wryly, "only he informed me a short while ago that he is a 'Mounted Police official, an auditor, travelling incognito!'"

His eyes filled with repugnance, the Doctor angrily tapped the heel of his pipe against the seat.

A bride of a week, I was on my way into the Northland, into God's Wide Open Spaces where men were men and where, I soon learned, white women were placed on pedestals since they were few in number and far between.

A little over a year before I had met my Fate! At the head office of the Hudson's Bay Company in Winnipeg, where I was Secretary to Cliff Thomas, Manager of the Land Sales Department, there was a great deal of talk concerning the forthcoming Pageant with which the Company proposed to celebrate their 250th Anniversary. Apart from sounding like an interesting show it meant little else to me until, one bitter January morning, there appeared in the office a tall, broad-shouldered Englishman whose bronzed face and lean body bore the unmistakable stamp of the Great Outdoors.

"That's Philip Godsell," Mr. Thomas told me as the

stranger breezed around jovially greeting everyone in the Fur Trade Department. "Factor in charge of Long Lac in Northern Ontario, he has just returned from England. Sir Robert Kindersley, the Governor, has deputized him to organize and conduct the Pageant."

"He seems like a lot of fun!" I smiled.

Thanks to the *camaraderie* which existed amongst the staff, I attended a party with him soon afterwards and found myself mingling with a totally different type of men from those whom I'd been accustomed to, particularly to the Military staff I'd been so closely associated with during the First Great War. From far and near they had come to take part in the celebration.

There was genial Captain Mack, gigantic skipper of the *Nascopie* which nosed her way annually through the ice-filled seas of the Eastern Arctic to carry supplies to the Polar outposts of the Company and bring back the furry wealth of the wilderness to distant London; Captain Norman Freakley of the *Stork*, a handsome salt with a fund of sea yarns and an irrepressible sense of humour which endeared him to one and all; Chris Harding, a Eurasian and veteran trader amongst the nomad tribesmen of the far-off Mackenzie, who had carried the red banner of the Company into the frozen reaches of the Western Arctic, to say nothing of a host of others whose lives, equally as colourful, had been spent along the frontier sowing the seeds of History and Progress.

Finally, on Monday, May 3, 1920, I stood at the gates of Lower Fort Garry, on the banks of the historic Red River, the Old Stone Fort, as it was called, which had cradled the Mounted Police when the West was young, and watched the golden sunlight playing upon the nodding plumes and beaded buckskin of a hundred tawny braves; upon golden birchbarks, and red-painted York boats which, like the galleys of old, leapt to the sweep of

the eighteen-foot oars in the sinewy hands of buckskin-clad crews as the re-enactment of an old-time fur brigade swept with all its barbaric pomp and colour around the point and bore down upon the fort, the air vibrant with the crackle of musketry from the oncoming canoes.

Before the pierced stone walls cannon boomed out a stentorian welcome, sending clouds of silvery smoke billowing far out over the sparkling waters. A sudden surge and the brigade had landed. Heaving bulky fur bales upon their backs they headed for the gateway.

Whisked from amongst the milling crowd to a point of vantage by Captain Mack, I saw the tall, silk-hatted figure of Sir Robert Kindersley seated upon a raised platform in the shadow of the red-roofed bastion. Before him, in all the glitter and panoply of beaded buckskin, painted faces and swaying eagle feathers, squatted the bedizened chiefs and headmen of the tribes drawn from the farthest reaches of the land.

Clad in the fringed buckskin of a fur trader, Phil introduced his redskin friends who greeted the Governor in a medley of Indian tongues; then the peace pipe passed from lip to lip sealing, once again, the bonds of friendship which had so long existed between the Company and the redmen.

As the ceremony closed with the presentation of medals struck in honour of the occasion, the Governor and his party became the centre of a mob of wildly-dancing Indians as the tribesmen mingled in the Dance of Peace while, from the old trading store, there came the sound of screeching fiddles, the sing-song of the caller-off and the pounding of moccasined feet as old-timers, who had hunted buffalo where the City of Winnipeg stands today, indulged in the riotous fun of the Red River Jig, the Eightsome Reel and other favourites with friends and relatives from the Far Places.

As the tranquillity of evening permeated the fort, as shadowy forms of aged hunters became limned against the flickering fires of their painted lodges, and the acrid fumes of *kinni-kinnick* were wafted on the still air, Phil and I sat on an upturned canoe beside the purling waters of the Red, chatting over the events of the day. And there, in the quiet enchantment of this sylvan and historic spot — surrounded momentarily with the glamour and romance of the past — he spoke the words which were forever to change my destiny.

Fifteen months later he returned from the far-off reaches of the Mackenzie River and insisted that he was taking me North with him, *here and now* and that he was through with loneliness, stodgy bannock and greasy, Indian cooking. Thus, on Monday, September 19, 1921, we were married in All Saints' Church, the ceremony being performed by the Reverend R. C. Johnston, an old friend of my family, and I was, literally, dragged North to become a passenger on the renowned *Muskeg Limited*.

It was a desolate region through which we were passing, made more so by the revealing nakedness of autumn's frosty grip. Here and there, as though flaunting defiance at the Great Destroyer which had turned others of his kind into grotesque caricatures, a lofty pine spread his seared branches in stately scorn, whilst clumps of cottonwood and poplar saucily jingled their bronze and silver coins in the woodland's Dance of Death ere spilling onto the bosom of Mother Earth to become sustenance for the beauty of seasons yet to come.

At noon the train clattered to a halt and grub-boxes, tea kettles and frying pans were hustled outside. Campfires were kindled beside the track and soon the aroma of bacon and beans was wafted on the pine-scented breeze.

Around the fires everyone got to know each other, the

artificial barriers which civilization imposes being completely broken down in the *camaraderie* of the trail. In no time, I found myself chatting and laughing with Slim MacDonald over the lady who was dinning the details of her operations into the ears of those seated beside her. Since leaving Edmonton this formidable female had insisted upon entertaining the entire coach with the story of her multifarious bouts with the surgeon's knife.

"She should have a map of her internal geography hung around her neck!" Slim chuckled diabolically.

"Internal geography, pahl!" Dr. Ings stirred his tea impatiently. "It sounds more like a *butcher's* inventory to me!"

Lunch over, grub-boxes were repacked and soon we were on our way again.

Slowly, monotonously, the track crept under us, often submerged in water, to pour away into the pine-clad distance. Passing rotting boxcars that had collapsed into the ditch we ambled up hill, down dale and through woods and clay-cuts to wallow in deep muskegs where, often for hours, the rails would be invisible beneath the gooey slime. Once or twice, after frenzied efforts to climb a slight declivity, the engine would stop with a despairing snort; the overalled conductor would apologetically ask all passengers to please jump off and walk to lighten the load. After backing up a couple of miles the engine would come swaying along, puffing and wheezing mightily and, finally, top the hill. "All aboard!" some trainman would yell and we would jump on once again. Ere long the train would come to another stop, a filled-in clay-cut, and each male passenger would get behind the business end of a shovel and help remove the few tons of earth that had fallen in upon the track. The year before, it had taken Phil three weeks to negotiate the three hundred miles between Edmonton and the end-of-steel and I wondered,

as we slowly crawled along, how long it was going to take us now.

As we rattled and jolted along, I became increasingly concerned regarding eight lively youngsters who, from the moment we left Edmonton, were here, there and everywhere, hanging out of windows, balancing precariously upon the steps, swinging from the handrails and otherwise risking their necks as well as annoying the crew. Through it all the mother, a placid, dark-eyed half-breed, smiled benignly. Suddenly the car was thrown into a turmoil. The red-headed four-year-old was missing! With astonishing unconcern the mother quietly remarked: "I guess he's fallen off!"

Headed by Phil and Dr. Ings, trappers and Indians turned the train upside down, searching every hiding place to no avail. Finally the conductor was rooted out of the caboose and the train brought to a halt. Sick and trembling, I envisioned a mangled form lying in a gory mass somewhere along the track as the train went into reverse.

We must have backed up at least four miles when, in the distance, a diminutive dot appeared between the rails. Yes! it was moving. As we drew closer, I recognized the missing Jimmy. With a fortitude worthy of any Northern son he had picked himself up after falling overboard and doggedly plodded along in pursuit certain that, sooner or later, he must inevitably overtake the slow-moving *Muskeg Limited!*

Hardly had the excitement subsided than the cadaverous face of the Police "auditor" appeared over my husband's shoulder.

"Sa-ay!" he drawled in a nasal half-whisper. "I've got a little job to do at Fort Smith that'll keep me there till November 1st. How'll chances be to get out right afterwards?"

"Rotten!" Phil replied.

His bleary eyes, with the white circles around the irises, surveyed us gloomily. "Hell!" he snorted. "I've got another 'case' at Halifax on December 1st. It means five hundred bucks to me. I don't wanna chance missin' that!"

"If you go down-river you'll never make it," Phil assured him. "The ice will be running till the middle of November then, after freeze-up, you'll have a five-hundred-mile hike by dog-team back to the end-of-steel."

"Hell and *damnation!*" he exploded angrily. "The Commissioner told me I'd be able to get out right away. Tell me—is there a telegraph office at Fort McMurray?"

"There *is*," the Doctor surveyed him coldly, "and I'd advise you to make other arrangements as soon as possible!"

At last the sun dropped behind the sombre spruce and night engulfed us in its sable mantle, giving a mournful cadence to the wail of the engine as it plugged on through the enveloping wilderness which closed in on us like ebony walls till we seemed to be burrowing through a turgid channel of stygian blackness. As the trainman lighted the huge oil chandelier overhead the irrepressible Slim produced a deck of cards and soon we were deep in a game of bridge—my suitcase for a table.

Occasionally a papoose would whimper sleepily and the strains of a soft Indian lullaby would mingle with the hum of voices as some tawny mother sought to soothe her restless offspring. At last there was a general stir. Coats, suitcases and dunnage-bags were pressed into service as pillows; bedrolls were unslung and, in no time, the coach was converted into a sort of community bedroom—those of us without bedrolls making the best of the slatted-hardwood seats. Using my suitcase for a pillow, I curled up as comfortably as possible upon my rigid

"couch" until, at last, the rhythm of the rails caused me to slip off into the arms of Morpheus.

Some time later I awakened. Everything was deathly still except for the sound of sloshing rain cascading down upon the train. Glancing around, I noticed the absence of the two nuns. Fighting the overwhelming loneliness which suddenly engulfed me — afraid someone would awaken and see my stinging tears — I pressed my face against the streaming window and peered outside just in time to see the Sisters disappearing like wraiths down a dim trail in the wake of a mackinaw-clad man whose shining lantern bobbed up and down like an enormous firefly.

"What's the matter, old girl?" my husband glanced across at me.

"I was just feeling lonely," I managed to force a smile, "but I'm all right now. Watching those two nuns going off into the Unknown, so to speak, has made me realize I must keep my chin up. When women like that can 'take it' then—*so can I!*"

About two o'clock the following afternoon the train came to a halt beside a dilapidated, bark-roofed cabin nestling amongst some scrub willows near the track.

"Well, here we are, Jean," smiled Philip. "Here's the end of *this* trail."

"AND — here's where we *eat!*" grinned Slim, slinging his dunnage-bag over his shoulder and preparing to disembark.

Stepping from the gravelled roadbed onto soft, spongy moss, I observed a number of people watching us with undisguised interest. A second later a lean, hard-jawed man with penetrating blue eyes and a warm smile stepped forward with extended hand.

"Welcome to the North, Mrs. Godsell!" His voice was soft and low.

It was Mickey Ryan, ex-prize fighter, skinner and jack-of-all-trades, from Boise, Idaho, who was now engaged in trucking, and hauling the mail from the end-of-steel to Fort McMurray. Little did any of us then think that Mickey was destined, within a few years, to become a millionaire through the opening up of Yellowknife!

As we stood chatting a short, plump woman with a decided Irish cast of countenance dashed up and threw her arms about me.

"Shure an' it's the *bride!* It does me ould heart good to see you. Welcome to the North. What a lucky man you are!" she turned and poked Phil's chest.

"Jean," Phil was laughing, "this is Mary O'Neill, head stewardess on the *Athabasca River!*"

"And the bane of our lives," Mickey grinned impishly. "She's always trying to corrupt our morals with her ribald sense of humour."

"*Morals!*" she ejaculated, mock amazement upon her humorous face. "Who ever heard of morals in this country?"

Just as the repartee was reaching the earthy stage the *Muskeg Limited* shuddered to the hissing of steam and the clang! clang! of the engine's bell.

"Guess I'd better be clambering aboard," laughed Mary. "It's a long, long trail that winds between here and Edmonton!"

Poising on the lower step of the coach she turned and winked roguishly at Mickey as a beautiful, blonde-haired woman in khaki shirt and riding breeches strode along at the edge of the woods.

"Mr. Ryan," I ejaculated, "are *all* the women in the North as beautiful as that one? What on earth does she do here?" Momentarily, amazement had gotten the better of me and the words spilled from my lips.

"She's the music teacher," Mickey replied, glancing at my husband.

"A *music* teacher—here in the wilderness!" I ejaculated.

"Yes," Mickey smiled. "She plays on the organ!"

Was *my* face ever red when, a couple of days later, I learned the true nature of the lady's profession!

"Come an' git it!" yelled a bronzed, square-jawed man from the doorway of the little log shack, the sod roof of which sported a riot of vegetation and young saplings. Mickey took me by the arm and escorted me inside, seating me at one end of a long trestle-table laden with enamel plates and mugs. Next second Red Martin, his brawny teamster-cook, placed a mound of corned beef and rice before me.

"Hae ye ony milk in this joint?" sang out Red Angus MacDonald.

"Milk comin' up!" Red Martin chuckled.

Tossing a handful of flour into a cracked pitcher, and mixing it with water from a nearby pail, he stirred vigorously then plunked the jug on the table. "There y'ar—help yu'sell"

I was overcome with laughter but Red Angus soon had the laugh on me when I was asked what kind of pie I'd like for dessert. "A small portion of raisin pie, thank you!" I replied, my eyes sweeping the array on a ledge beneath the small window. For, when Red approached the pies, the "raisins" rose in an angry, buzzing cloud and *flew* away!

Lunch over, with Phil, Dr. Ings, Walter Hale, Slim MacDonald and the hangman, I clambered aboard Mickey's gasoline-jigger that was waiting to convey us over the two remaining miles of track to the actual end-of-steel. No sooner were we seated, à la Irish jaunting car, than the jigger spurted forward under the masterly touch of "Gasoline Gus." Within a few minutes we sped

past an enormous board adorned with a skull and cross-bones at one side of the track to denote where two engineers had died the previous summer.

"Hold on, for God's sake!" yelled Gus. Walter Hale leaned across and clasped me firmly by the arm. Next second we were swaying madly, high in the air over a deep chasm, the rails and ties alone supporting us—the enormous rocks below adorned with what had once been the bridge!

"Hoorah! Hoorah!" Gus was waving his hat madly as, with neat precision, he hit *terra firma* once more. "We've made it! *We've made it!*"

The mad ride was over before I even had time to be afraid but we were a pretty silent lot until we reached the end of our journey, when I learned a landslide earlier in the season had smashed things to pot—and that everyone had been much too busy during the season to repair the damage. Until this trip, Mickey had gotten the jigger-passengers to sign a paper absolving him from all responsibility in case of loss of life or limb! Despite a sudden twinge of fear, I had to smile. Either we weren't sufficiently important for Mickey to bother about our signing anything or else he assumed, being a good Irishman, he was still wearing shamrocks in his shoes!

Slipping, sliding, clutching at overhanging spruce boughs, we sprawled down the steep bank at the end of the run, boarded an Indian-manned scow at the Hanging Stone—near the present site of Waterways—and headed down-river, the brilliant sun revealing all the glory of the high banks with their wealth of woodland, riotous vegetation and blaze of colour—all the wealth of Nature in one of her most passionate and unrestrained moods.

At Fort McMurray we were greeted by the blood-curdling chorus of ravenous huskies who roamed everywhere in search of scraps. No sooner were we ashore

than Bob Bennett, brother of the late Prime Minister R. B. Bennett, took charge of our luggage and we ploughed in his wake through thick mud and gumbo till we reached the main street of this frontier settlement—a long, muddy swath through the forest with a scattering of log cabins, unpainted frame houses and a few ramshackle stores. Outside the whitewashed, log-walled hotel we were halted by a handsome, heavy-set man whose genial, sun-tanned face exuded the very essence of the Great Outdoors.

“Meet Colonel Cornwall, better known as ‘Peace River Jim’,” my husband smiled.

“How do you do!” The Colonel swept his broad-brimmed Stetson in a wide flourish and shook hands. Then came the inevitable greeting: “Welcome to the North!”

Turning to Phil his face crinkled in a wide smile. “It sure must be nice to have a pretty girl like this to keep you warm at night!”

A one-time member of Coxey’s Army, Jim had drifted into the Peace River country years before, become one of the loudest exponents of its vast possibilities, a trader, dog-driver, freighter and member of Parliament. He had also done much to bring about the building of the Alberta and Great Waterways Railway, over which I had just travelled, to open up the North. He was also instrumental in promoting the construction of the Edmonton, Dunvegan and British Columbia Railway to open up the magnificent farm lands of the Peace. Then, too, it was Jim who perpetuated the name and fame of Twelve-Foot Davis by moving his remains from Lesser Slave Lake to the summit of the towering hill overlooking Peace River Crossing — now the town of Peace River — and erecting upon the grave a stone bearing the legend: “Pathfinder, Pioneer, Miner and Trader. He was every man’s friend and never locked his cabin door.” Later, Jim was to

become a frequent visitor at our home in Fort Fitzgerald.

"Welcome to the North!" As the now familiar greeting again smote my ears I glanced around to see a willowy blonde in buckskin coat, riding breeches and moccasins speeding towards us behind a team of magnificent, pointed-eared huskies.

Drawing the team to a halt, and slinging her caribou-skin dog-whip around her neck, she extended a slender hand. "I'm Cassie Owen," she smiled warmly. "I'm sure glad to meet you!"

"Where are you off to now?" the Colonel patted her warmly on the back.

"To the fish-camp to put up dog-feed for the winter!" With a quick movement she unslung her whip and cracked it over the ears of the team. "*Marche!*" she shouted and, with a wave of her hand, disappeared down the trail.

"Cassie's quite a girl," the Colonel's eyes were filled with deep admiration. "As capable as they come. Pretends to be hard-boiled but, beneath the surface, she's really very generous—and she'll never see anyone stuck. After a month at the fish-camp she'll be out on the trapline, working like hell."

It was here that I was destined to meet the Sutherlands, one of the kindest, most hospitable families in the entire North. Engineer on the Company's sternwheeled *Athabasca River*, John resided in a neat, whitewashed, red-roofed house at the junction of the Clearwater and the Athabasca rivers with his genial, rosy-cheeked wife, Jean, who exuded the very essence of Highland dignity and pride, and their two children, Barrie and George—the latter a slender, handsome image of his father, and Barrie one of the most beautiful girls I've ever laid eyes upon and whose disposition was on a par with her



The Muskeg Limited, on which the author travelled to the end-of-steel.

Group taken at the Hudson's Bay Company's 250th Anniversary Pageant on Red River. The author (front row centre) and Philip H. Godsell (behind, in fur cap).



The author, standing with R.C.M.P. Constable "Slim" MacDonald, bids good-bye to civilization and embarks in scow for 500-mile trip to the heart of the wilderness.

Fort Chipewyan, cradle of exploration. Factor John James Louttit at left.

comeliness. So warm was their welcome that I immediately felt at home.

In startling contrast to the grey drabness of the settlement which even the brilliant sun couldn't dissipate, the house emanated a warmth and snugness that was irresistible with its colourful drapes and rugs, gleaming floors and furniture, and the soft patina of antique brass, copper and pewter which bespoke the loving care of generations of hands in the Land o' Heather so far across the sea. The dinner table was beautifully set with snowy linen, sparkling crystal, silver, and a lovely old dinner service whilst, in the centre, reposed a centrepiece of flaming red Geranium blossoms. I couldn't help but marvel at such luxury on the frontier and, as course followed course of the most delicious food, I realized Mrs. Sutherland was a veritable wizard with food as well as being an immaculate housekeeper.

As I looked around I could well understand her indignation a few years before when, upon returning from a holiday in Thurso, Scotland, she found her house—which had been rented during her absence to a half-breed family—filled with bedbugs. Furiously, day after day, she had gone after Mr. Wilson, the Company's Manager at Fort Vermilion, demanding that he do something since he was responsible for the situation. Finally, he whirled in exasperation and snapped: "I'm *sick* of this. You'd better take another good look at the bugs you're complaining of and see if they haven't got *tartan* backs!"

"For a long time afterwards," Mr. Sutherland laughed, "Fort Vermilion was a decidedly uncomfortable place for Mr. Wilson. All Jean had to do was to appear on the trail and he'd scuttle for cover!"

After dinner, Phil dropped down to the Company's post where he ran into the hangman. Promptly he had introduced Mr. Ellis to all and sundry as a "high-ranking

Mounted Police official travelling incognito." Like wild-fire, the news spread amongst the socially-starved ladies of the settlement. Here was something, indeed—a *Government* official! In their anxiety to capture this social prize they, literally, fell over each other. The hangman became the social lion of the hour.

Shortly after my husband returned, Mrs. Cunningham, the postmanager's wife, dashed in, eyes aglow. "You're all coming to the dance, aren't you?" she asked, quivering with excitement.

"*Dance!*" Mrs. Sutherland stared perplexedly.

"Haven't you heard? The ladies are putting on a dance in Bigg's Hall in honour of the Mounted Police official who's here. Be sure and turn up. I've got to go now and dress!" With that she disappeared.

The moment the door closed Mrs. Sutherland subsided in her chair in a burst of laughter. "*Mr. Godsell*—you imp! How could you . . . *how could you?*"

Beneath the flickering coal-oil lamps in the log-walled dance hall, to the squeak of fiddles and the thump! thump! of pounding feet, Mr. Ellis rose to the occasion with great *éclat*. He tap-danced, sang *risque* songs, fussed over the babies, and showered the ladies with flowery compliments, until they positively wriggled with delight. Impartial though he was with his attentions to the fair sex, the green-eyed monster soon raised his ugly head and flinty, indeed, were the looks that flashed between the ladies. Then the truth leaked out! The joke had been too much for "Frenchy", the genial but volatile Mounted Police constable. Wildly, the whisper leapt from lip to lip. *Mr. Ellis was the hangman!*

I looked around for my husband only to see him disappearing hurriedly through the door with John Sutherland.

"Look out, my dear," Dr. Ings chuckled as a bundle of

feline fury catapulted across the room towards us. "Here comes the butcher's wifel"

"I'll . . . I'll *kill* your damned husband!" she hissed, her eyes flashing fire. "I'll KILL him!" Her voice rose to a shrill falsetto.

A few days later the hangman headed for the Outside aboard the *Muskeg Limited* to the vast relief of all. Not because of his profession but because everyone now felt that poor Albert Lebeau, for whom every Northerner had a deep sympathy, would escape the noose since, soon, it would be too late for another hangman to be brought in. However, Slim MacDonald remained with us to carry the despatches to Inspector Percival, Officer Commanding at Fort Fitzgerald, and report that the hangman had turned tail and deserted him.

It was an entirely new world I was in. English was at a discount here; the soft, sibilant Cree and the *voyageur's* French patois were spoken everywhere. The erstwhile Indian *voyageur* and hunter were the most interesting features—tall, silent, moccasined men, followed by ghost-like dogs that are the beasts of burden in winter, and are usually left to shift for themselves in the summertime. The one conjecture 'round cabin and wigwam was: "How will the rabbits be running this coming winter?" For the rabbit in the North is the background of the entire economy of the forests, on which lynx, foxes, marten and other fur-bearing animals prey for sustenance. Every seven years an epidemic carries off the white bunnies and, with them, go the lynx, foxes and other animals on whose skins the Indians and trappers depend for a living. In "bad rabbit years" it is as though a plague had struck the entire country and starvation stalks the land. Here, too, one gets an introduction to the word that is the keynote of the Cree Indian character—*Cyam* (pronounced Kee-yam)—which, freely translated, means: "Never mind!"

"Don't worry!" "It's all right!" "There's all kinds of time!" Everywhere "the Company" — meaning, of course, the Hudson's Bay Company—dominated both the scene and the conversation, while its power was felt throughout the Silent Places.

"What are the two greatest things on earth?" Mrs. Leslie Wood of Athabasca Landing once asked the dusky members of her Sunday School class.

"The King and the Company!" came the prompt response.

"And of these, which is the greater?"

Johnny Ocass rubbed one moccasin thoughtfully over the other. "The Company!" came the answer. "The King sometimes dies—but *the Company goes on forever!*"

North of 55° N. the country had a vocabulary of its own. Bread became "bannock"; a steep bank a "cutbank"; an island, or a sandbar in the river, a "batture"; a narrow channel a "sheny"; a group of log cabins encircled by a picket fence a "fort"; while, from here northward, the terms "dollars" and "cents" were unknown, all articles being valued in "skins" or "made-beaver", harking back to the days when a round beaver-skin was the unit of currency. *Babiche*, a rawhide line, was the tie-that-binds, and "thread" — the sinew taken from beside the spinal column of caribou or moose.

Here, I was in the heart of the silent "Land of the Three Rivers"; northward stretched the mighty Athabasca to be joined by the Slave and the still mightier Mackenzie River, reaching two thousand miles from my feet to the land of the Midnight Sun and the Polar Sea.

2.

A Bride Goes North

On the afternoon of October 1 we piled aboard the last north-bound scow of the season. Against the dark background of sombre pines the bronze and scarlet of cottonwood and poplar shimmered in the soft golden haze of Indian summer, reflecting their glory on the restless bosom of the beautiful Clearwater.

Time and again we had hustled down to the waterfront only to find that rumours of our departure were but false alarms. Now, at last, our argosy was loaded—two long, flat-bottomed scows lashed together, one containing the engine and the other piled high with a heterogeneous assortment of last-minute mail, barrels of salt pork, sacks of flour and what-not for the down-river posts. A heavy tarpaulin, supported by hooped willows, was thrown over all and lashed to the sides of the freight-scow.

Practically everyone in the settlement was down to see us off and I found myself the recipient of at least two dozen parcels containing gifts, to say nothing of a huge box filled with roasted chickens, home-made bread, cakes, pies, jars of jam, pickles and delicious salads—all the product of Mrs. Sutherland's kitchen.

"It's not much of a gift," she apologized, "but I know what scow travel's like!"

Added to this the Doctor's man, Jack Currie, handed me a wooden baking-board which he had made for me.

Then the Doctor, himself, presented me with a hot-water bottle, a gift which evoked general laughter.

"I cannot give you roses in this land of ice and snow, *Madame*," he bowed with mock formality, a merry twinkle in his eyes, "but the warmth you will derive from this humble gift will be as nothing compared to the warmth I hold in my heart for you and your husband!"

Believe me, that same hot-water bottle proved a boon, indeed, to all of us as we floated northward through cold and rain and sleet. Since it was the only means we had of keeping warm when the frigid fingers of approaching winter occasionally reached out and covered the land we shared it, turn about.

The engine sputtered. Dan Patterson, the good-natured, mackinaw-clad skipper with the decided Clydeside accent, straightened up, looked around then emitted a wild war-whoop. "Where the hell's Wada?" he exploded. "*Where's that damned Jap?*"

"Up at the beer parlour," Red Angus hiccupped, "all lit up . . . all lit-up!"

"Jock!" Dan turned to his brother, the engineer, "go an' bring that slant-eyed celestial doon here at yincc. Hog-tie him if ye hae tae. We've nae time tae lose!"

Half an hour later, Jock and Slim MacDonald ambled back along the trail. They had followed Dan's orders literally. From a long pole resting upon their shoulders dangled the inert form of the diminutive Wada, his wrists and ankles bound tightly together, his head flopping from side to side. With a mighty heave they tossed him atop the mail-sacks beneath the tarp. Immediately, the lines were cast off and, to the spluttering *chug! chug!* of the engine, a chorus of raucous farewells and the blood-curdling howls of the huskies, our clumsy craft nosed into the swift-flowing current of the Athabasca. We were northward-bound at last! But we didn't go far. Since dusk

was already falling we swung from the Clearwater into the mighty Athabasca and anchored for the night in full view of Fort McMurray and the Sutherland's cosy home.

It was with mixed feelings that I surveyed the primitive craft that was to carry us some five-hundred miles northward to my wilderness home. There was little of romance about it. Apart from our "Bridal Chamber"—a hole in the tarpaulin-covered mountain of freight—there was no privacy of any kind, whilst no provision whatsoever had been made for the passengers other than a rough "galley" in the bow large enough to accommodate a rickety iron stove, resting on old tomato cans, and an assortment of chipped-enamel mugs, plates, pots and four heavy iron frying-pans over which presided Paul Mueller, a German trapper working his passage north as "chef"—the dirtiest human I ever saw!

"Well," my husband asked, "how do you like it?"

"Ye gods!" I grimaced. "It *would* take me to pick on a set-up like this for a honeymoon. Take me to find myself sleeping atop sacks of flour decorated with a *bare bed-spring*, with your eiderdown robe as a coverlet!"

"You're travelling in *comfort* compared to the others," he laughed, "who'll merely be curling up in their bedrolls and sleeping on the deck beneath the sky!"

That evening, I was given the "seat of honour" in the galley—the triangular corner of one of our trunks which protruded from beneath the freight. I had to sit pigeon-toed to keep my balance. Dinner, *à la Mueller*, consisted of greasy, boiled spareribs which were, indeed *spare*; soggy potatoes, which Paul fished out of the tepid water by hand; and the inevitable northern *pièce de résistance*—BEANS! How I came to loathe them!

Apart from Walter Hale, Slim MacDonald, Red Angus and Wada, our party was augmented by Mr. Sawle of the Northern Trading Company, a short and very important

individual who endeavoured to make up for his lack of height by sporting the most enormous Stetson I ever saw. It seemed so much a part of him that I would swear he merely pushed it down over his nose when he slept at night. There was also Vernon West, the dour, taciturn Inspector for the Lamson and Hubbard Company, an American concern that had recently dared to challenge the might of the Hudson's Bay Company in the land their factors had ruled with almost undisputed sway since the days of the Merry Monarch; and Miss Wiley, the only woman apart from myself. A dusky daughter of Fort Chipewyan, she was always silent and impassive.

I awakened early the following morning to find that our craft had pulled out into the current and was heading down the mighty reaches of the Athabasca. As we passed the Tar Sands, now so much in the public eye, the air was redolent with their acrid odour.

For a while we seemed to be travelling through an opaque world of pearly whiteness till the rising sun broke through the curling mist and revealed the sombre banks crested with their wealth of pines which rose in serried array like cathedral spires.

Dipping ice-cold water from the river, I was in the midst of my ablutions when a thin, weak voice from overhead startled me. Glancing up, I spied the bleary-eyed, puffy face of Wada, the Jap, peering down into the privacy of our "*boudoir*". "WOW!" he groaned pathetically. "I gotta headache. Anybody here got an eye-opener?"

"How about a shot of Old Buck Rum?" Phil surveyed the woebegone visage with a wide grin. Producing a bottle, he poured the ailing Oriental a good stiff drink. With trembling hands Wada grasped the glass, gulped avidly then disappeared from sight, groaning miserably

as he crawled between the freight and the tarpaulin, headed for the galley.

Never do I eat breakfast but, this morning, between the brisk northern air and the enticing aroma of sizzling bacon, I headed for the galley hungry as a hunter. Greeting me with wide smile, Paul dived between the stove and the tarp and came up with a chipped-enamel plate. Moistening his thumb with his tongue he scraped the surface vigorously then, *to be sure everything was sanitary*, he polished the plate on the seat of his greasy overalls, filled it with bacon, soggy potatoes and a veritable sea of grease then handed it to me with a great big, cheerful: "There y'ar—eat HEARTY!"

Trembling with nausea, I jumped blindly into the engine-scow and sat on a small wooden keg, trying to keep my tummy in place. I was endeavouring to strike a match for my cigarette against the side of it when a roar of apprehension blasted the frosty air. Phil yanked me roughly to my feet and yelled to Dan to get the blankety-blank keg put in a safe place immediately, along with the others.

"Sorry, old girl," he apologized. "*That keg is filled with gunpowder!*"

All day we continued to chug along without seeing a soul or a single sign of habitation upon the banks. Huddled in heavy coats, we chatted and gazed idly at the passing pageant of woodland scenery, aglow here and there with vivid splotches of bronze, crimson and gold. Overhead, geese honked by in V-shaped battalions, arousing in Slim an ever-increasing hunger. "God!" he'd groan. "Here we are, gnawing *ribs* and watching all those swell dinners flying by to Nowhere!"

Yellowlegs screamed from rock to rock along the shore whilst, occasionally, a huge white owl would flap lazily above the spiked tops of the sentinel pines. Towards

evening the sun dropped behind the ragged rim of the forested banks, suffusing the autumn sky with a riot of orange, yellow, pink and purple whilst the air became perceptibly colder. Eyes ever alert, Dan scrutinized the left bank. "We'll tie up in an hour," he told me. "There's a swell camping-place ahead!"

At last, the bow of our unwieldy craft impacted against the soft mud, the gangplank was thrown ashore, lines were made fast to nearby trees and, in no time, a roaring campfire of ten-foot logs was sending forked flames of scarlet leaping high into the encircling gloom.

"A Life on the Ocean Wave . . . !" bellowed the irrepressible Slim, who was here, there and everywhere brandishing frying-pans, opening grub-boxes and generally getting in everyone's way.

Whilst the crew were gathering more wood, Miss Wiley squatted stolidly beside the fire, plucking six mallard ducks that had fallen to the gun of Vernon West. Splitting them, she braced them open with a short stick, then attached the birds to longer ones which were thrust in the earth before the fire so that they would roast before the flames. Many times afterwards I ate birds *ponasked* in this manner and always considered them superb.

Through the maze of lacy boughs overhead a golden moon rode majestically in a sea of deepest indigo whilst the stars, like silver lamps, seemed so close I felt as though I could reach up and grasp a handful. The shadows of the woods, a rosy hue from the flames of our fire, deepened from purple to black in the background whilst a thin, wraithlike mist twisted and coiled above the crinkly surface of the river. And, over all, pervading all, falling upon us with a solemn calm, was the tremendous and irresistible sense of a mighty solitude—the forest silence.

There was something nostalgic about it all, something magical in the brooding stillness of the primordial wilder-

ness broken only by the splash of waters, the mournful hoot of a night-owl somewhere in the distance, and the crackling of the logs as they fell apart and sent a crimson cascade of sparks flying upwards.

"Let's have a sing-song!" Slim snubbed out his cigarette.

Never did *My Ain Folk* and *Ye Banks and Braes* sound so plaintive nor tear at the heartstrings as they did that night when we mingled our voices and Dan sent his rich baritone echoing back from the primeval woods and out over the silvered waters with all the fervid pathos of the Scot. For over an hour we sang all the dear old songs, a handful of exiles in the silent wilderness blending our unspoken thoughts and nostalgia in the magic of music. As though in sympathy with our mood, the forlorn howl of a lone wolf in the depths of the forest broke the ethereal hush.

It was Slim who brought us back to earth and dissipated the lumps in our throats. "Did I ever tell you," he chuckled, "of how I came to join the Mounted Police? I was at a loose end in Vancouver when I heard of a job, making thunder in a theatre at five dollars a night. With my first pay, I bought a crock to celebrate. The next night, still feeling no pain, my alcoholic enthusiasm caused me to start making thunder before I got my cue. And," he laughed, "I liked the sound of it so much I just kept on till long after the storm had passed. The Manager, a lousy son-of-a-gun with no sense of humour, got six burly scene-shifters to heave me out. The next day, my theatrical career ended, I went to the Mounted Police barracks, signed on and, here I am — a' 'andsome member o' the Gallopin' Perlice!"

Tapping out his pipe, Phil arose and headed for the scow to fix the leaky tarpaulin which formed the roof of our "bridal chamber." For some inexplicable reason, I suddenly recalled the topical song hit, *The Love Nest*,

and, without a thought of where I was, or the company I was in, I called out in dulcet tones: "Dah-ling! Is the love nest ready?"

If a bomb had exploded at his feet he couldn't have been more startled. Momentarily he turned, the very personification of red-faced embarrassment, then bolted as a deafening roar of laughter sundered the silence.

The following afternoon Slim espied Jock Patterson seated atop his bedroll, enjoying a smoke. "HEY! YOU," he whooped in mock anger. "What the hell are you doing *sitting on my Love Nest?*"

From that time forward every trader, trapper and Mountie in the land referred to his bedroll as his "Love Nest"!

The next afternoon I asked Jock Patterson which part of the Clyde he came from.

"Greenock!" he replied succinctly in his thick burr.

"That's my home town, too," I told him.

"The hell ye say!" he growled. "You're no Scotch—you're English. Jist lissen tae ye're accent!"

"I'm every bit as Scottish as you are!" I laughed.

"Ye come frae Greenock, ye say. A'richt—jist name yin place in the toon!"

"The Hole-in-the-Wa'," I smiled, recalling the, to me, intriguing name of a pub on Argyle Street.

"Dan!" he emitted a stentorian yell. "D'ye ken Mrs. Godsell comes frae Greenoch? She kens the Hole-in-the-Wa'!"

"Whut's that?" came Dan's astonished exclamation as he turned and gave me a searching glance.

There came a shattering bump and the scows quivered from bow to stern, almost throwing me off my feet. We were high and dry on a sandbar, where we remained several hours until the crew succeeded in poling us back

into the stream. So much for Scot meeting Scot in the heart of the wilderness!

At first we had been an extremely jolly party but as grinding ice-pans crunched now and again against the scows to be shouldered astern, a warning that the season was getting late, and grey day followed grey day in monotonous succession, with sleet, snow, rain and biting winds thrown in for good measure, our spirits reacted to Nature's moods and we became less inclined for frivolity. It was now that Mrs. Sutherland's grub-box proved a boon indeed. Each night, after a session of cards around a packing-case topped with a guttering candle, we would all enjoy a bang-up feast of cold chicken, salads, cakes and steaming cocoa. However, the cramped quarters, the bone-chilling cold and general discomfort didn't worry me too much. I was in the North now, entering a strange new world, and I knew, if I wanted to get along, I simply had to take with good grace whatever turned up.

There was one thing, however, which did bother me and that was the complete lack of privacy and sanitary accommodation. This I found almost unbearable. From five o'clock in the morning until seven at night we continued to thread our way along the endless waterway without a halt. So dirty now was the weather, and so sodden the earth, that a cheering campfire in the evening was completely out of the question, whilst a walk in the woods or amongst thinly-scattered willows caused one and all to return to the scow soaked to the skin. Added to this, the ice-pans were becoming increasingly thicker and Dan, in his anxiety to get to our destination, was fearful of sacrificing even one second of daylight lest we be caught in the freeze-up, a situation that would have been fraught with peril for us all.

Miss Wiley, being a native daughter, didn't mind the lack of privacy as we tied up each night but to me it

was most unpleasant. Finally, one afternoon, finding no one in the galley, I purloined Mueller's grey-enamelled mixing-bowl and crept back to our quarters. When its loss was discovered, the wretched Paul wailed loud and long, a dozen times a day: "Who stole my damned mixing-bowl?" It was not till some years later that I confessed to my husband that *I* was the culprit. How he roared!

Near the willow-fringed mouth of the river the vast delta was alive with the whistling wings and honking of wildfowl and thousands of wavies, or white geese, which circled in graceful convolutions overhead.

"Slim," Wada turned to MacDonald, "how would you like to paddle me around in the canoe while I bring down a dinner?"

"Bro-ther! Lead me to it." Slim arose with alacrity. "*Lead me to it!*"

Next moment they were gone, paddling vigorously through the undulating wall of willows.

BANG! A gun cracked not far off and I watched a huge bird spinning crazily out of the formation to hit the river with a splash.

So thick were the birds that it was no time ere they returned with four large, fat wavies that must have weighed at least twelve pounds apiece. Soon feathers were flying like snowflakes as Miss Wiley plucked the birds. Paul stoked up the rickety stove, and Wada went to work with a will. A connoisseur of fine food, he never travelled anywhere without a small trunk laden with condiments of every description. Even on the winter trail in the farthest reaches of the Arctic this "treasure chest" was part of his outfit.

✓ Incidentally, so plentiful are the wavies around Fort Chipewyan in the spring and the fall that it is no unusual thing for an Indian to bag as many as three hundred at a time, which are either pickled in brine or frozen for

winter use. In the old days the fort depended largely on these waxies to augment the slender rations of the staff.

When two of the birds were finally whisked from the oven in all their golden-brown glory their tantalizing aroma, combined with the crisp northern air and our ravenous hunger, almost caused us to fall upon them like starving savages. What a feast that was! With delicious dressing, potatoes and thick brown gravy, we dined to repletion. What a change from Mueller's sour beans and greasy bones!

A fluent linguist, a racy *raconteur*, explorer, adventurer and inveterate gambler, Wada was one of the most amazing characters it has ever been my lot to meet. Years before, he had sponsored a phoney gold rush in Alaska. Salting away money mulcted from credulous miners to lead them to the "bonanza", he had attempted to abscond in the night with his dog-team only to be overtaken and become the principal actor in a prospective "necktie-party." Saved by the propitious discovery of gold at almost the very spot where he stood, Wada was freed and quickly hied himself to other and safer climes—leaving the city of Fairbanks, Alaska, so rumour hath it, to rise as a monument to the occasion.

Years later, making another alleged discovery on the Arctic coast, and interesting a group of New York financiers, he divided his time between mysterious trips to the outermost reaches of the North and journeys to San Francisco, Seattle, Chicago and New York, where he stayed at none but the best hotels—the idol of all the Oriental bellhops.

A born diplomat to boot, Wada was able to worm his way into the confidence and hearts of most of the wives of the leading officials in the land with his own particular brand of, often unsuspected, subtlety. With gifts of

expensive chocolates, jars of salad dressing, preserved ginger and other delicacies then unknown in the Lone Land, he not only won their esteem but that of a good many of the influential men as well, from Priest to Police Inspector.

Fifth Columnists were unthought of in those days, and Japan seemed very far away. To have even suggested that he was spying out the land for the Son of Heaven would have brought nothing but pungent scorn and ridicule down upon one's head. *That* I know—for I did so! Today, however, when I look back upon the wide ramifications of the Second World War, and recall the activity surrounding the building of the Alaska Highway, the Canol Pipeline to Whitehorse and other war projects in the North, I often wonder just *how* wrong I was after all. And I am not alone for there are others who have since wondered if there wasn't more behind those mysterious journeys of Wada's into what are now strategic parts of the North and Arctic than appeared on the surface at the time. For, he left the country enshrouded in the same deep mystery with which he had entered it—to disappear completely!

3.

My Wilderness Home

Early the following morning, I awakened to the soft lapping of waters and the muted chug! chug! of the engine on the still air. Pulling aside the tarpaulin, I gazed out upon a scene of breath-taking beauty. We had debouched from the delta onto the broad, calm reaches of beautiful Lake Athabasca. The weather had cleared and long waves of crimson and gold from the rising sun gilded the wide expanse of turquoise water. Sentinel pines, their stately grandeur softened by the clinging diaphanous mists, crested the red-grey rocky islands which met the eye in every direction. As the huge red disc of the sun climbed ever higher into the opalescent sky the gossamer tendrils of the mist were dissipated in a blaze of golden glory whilst, overhead, gulls and terns, filled with the sheer joy of living, circled and flashed whitely against the kaleidoscope of the heavens, screaming loudly as they dived in graceful convolutions to retrieve the scraps thrown overboard by Mueller. I was completely awed by the beauty of the scene. It reminded me, for all the world, of a Turner landscape.

As we chugged across the blue surface of the lake, I spied in the distance the red-grey granite shore of Fort Chipewyan, Athens of the Northwest, where, in days gone by, Nor'Westers and Hudson's Bay men warred for the furry wealth of this empire of the wilds. White-washed buildings, thrown into stark relief by the dark

green of the spruce, stretched like a necklace along a crescent-shaped beach of pinkest sand while, above them, towered the spires and turrets of the Roman Catholic Mission. Atop a lofty spur of rock rose the squat buildings of the Hudson's Bay fort surmounted with the red ensign bearing the magic symbol "H.B.C.", which the opposition traders interpreted as "Here Before Christ" or "The Half-breed's Curse"!

Scattered along the beach were the conical lodges of Chipewyan and Caribou Eater Indians, their up-turned canoes of birchbark gleaming redly in the sunlight. Wolfish dogs roamed everywhere, devouring everything they could get their paws on, and fighting over the smallest scrap of skin or offal. A blue pall of smoke overhung the settlement, extending like a canopy far out over the water. On the rocks and boulders tartan-clad squaws and Indians squatted on their haunches, their black eyes gazing stolidly upon us.

✓ Here was historic ground, the cradle of exploration, traversed a hundred and fifty years before by the feet of the swashbuckling Connecticut Yankee, Peter Pond, the first white man to cross the height of land and gaze over the placid waters of the Athabasca. An intrepid, though somewhat irascible pioneer, his notes and maps meant much to Alexander Mackenzie¹ when he set out to explore the vast reaches of "River Disappointment," as he called the stream now bearing his name, and, again later, when he set out from Fort Chipewyan on his historic overland journey to the Pacific. To me, even at that moment, something of the past still seemed to hover about the place.

On the heels of Peter Pond came the buccaneering

¹Some years later, I met "Black Mackenzie," a direct descendant of Alexander Mackenzie, at the Hart River, near Peace River Crossing, Alberta.

Nor'Westers, paddling their canoes three thousand miles from Montreal to wrest this region from the Hudson's Bay Company. The story of the long-drawn fight for the control of the rich fur trade of the Athabasca country still echoes down the ages and, in various distorted forms, is told around the glowing mud hearths of the descendants of those who participated in the fray. But the most authentic stories come from the mildewed archives of the fur trading companies themselves. Fort Chipewyan, where I now stood, was, of course, the focal point of the attack. Here, in 1802, when the Company had awakened from its lethargy, the aggressive Peter Fiddler had established a fort opposite this stronghold of the Nor'Westers, which had long been a thorn in the flesh of the "Gentlemen Adventurers." But his efforts had met with failure. ✓

Not until nine years later was another attempt made by the Hudson's Bay Company to recapture the trade of the Athabasca. Then John Clarke sailed across this beautiful lake at the head of a hundred *voyageurs* and a brigade of fourteen birchbark canoes. Erecting another fort, and despatching a party to Great Slave Lake, Clarke departed for the Peace River with forty-eight men, being forced to depend almost entirely upon the country for sustenance. But he failed to make allowances for the aggressive and somewhat unscrupulous character of his adversaries. Accepting the challenge with alacrity, the Nor'Westers despatched a party of *coureurs de bois* ahead of the Hudson's Bay expedition, with orders to make all the clamour possible to drive the game from the banks of the river, and to despatch inland all Indians so that they could not afford succour to the enemy. On the heels of the intruders followed McGillivray to make sure that none of his Nor'Westers gave aid to them. Disaster was, of course, inevitable. Eighteen of

the Hudson's Bay men perished from the combined effects of starvation and exposure, the rest being forced to capitulate to the Nor'Westers, in accordance with whose terms they delivered up their goods and undertook not to trade for another year.

When Clarke returned again the following autumn his men were deliberately forced into a disturbance by the Nor'Westers; he was arrested, and thirty bales of trading goods exacted as bail. The breakdown of the Company's offensive had been complete, and it is said that they sustained a loss of over one hundred thousand dollars.

While times had changed the Company had new adversaries in the swarm of small traders pouring into the country, and in the newly-formed Lamson and Hubbard Company of New York, and the bitterness of old still prevailed in the trading.

I have often wondered why so little space has been devoted to this vast and colourful region with its long years of warfare between contending Nor'Westers and Hudson's Bay men for supremacy and so much to the Yukon with its comparative short span of activity compressed into a vastly smaller area!

No sooner had we stepped ashore than my husband introduced the Hudson's Bay factor, John James Louttit, a stocky, barrel-chested man with heavy jowls, swarthy complexion and the blue-black hair of the native, and Mr. Kelly, the clerk, who was almost an albino. The factor acknowledged the introduction with what outwardly appeared to be shyness but my womanly intuition immediately recognized an underlying, undying hostility in his dark and smouldering eyes. He was, to say the least, anything but friendly and I immediately disliked him.

For untold ages he, and others of his ilk, had been

the uncrowned Lords of the North, exercising an almost despotic sway. But, with the gradual intrusion of civilization, these men were being slowly but surely shorn of their ruthless power and glory, which they resented with a deep undercurrent of bitter and malignant hatred. Of native extraction, their methods of resisting these changes were as devious as they were Machiavellian, as I was presently to learn.

I represented, without realizing it, *the very thing these native-born members of the old regime viewed with such suspicion and distrust.* From Fort McMurray to Fort McPherson, on the rim of the Polar Sea, two thousand miles to the northward, most of the Company's factors were still intermarried with the tribes, and women of mixed blood dominated the social and, to a large extent, the business life of all these forts and settlements. Instinct seemed to tell them, and truly, that, once their place was usurped by women of the acquisitive and dominating paleface race, they would be relegated to a position of more or less obscurity, completely shorn of all their power and glory—for what that was worth! *In all innocence I was stepping into a mare's nest without in the least suspecting it!*

As my husband chatted with John James about the trade a very pompous gentleman in clerical garb stepped up and introduced himself as Bishop Lucas of the Anglican Church. Ignoring the factor, he invited us over to the rectory for *tea*, even though it was early in the morning.

No doubt, the Bishop was still smarting under the indignity heaped upon him by George Louttit, the factor's brother, when, on a trip across the frozen lake the year before, the Bishop had annoyed him to a point of anger, whereupon Louttit had dumped the Reverend gentleman out of the *carriole* onto the ice and driven back to the

fort, leaving him to hoof it back as best he could in the bitter cold.

Declining his invitation with thanks we climbed up over the rocks and passed through the high, arched gateway of the fort into a courtyard flanked with whitewashed, log buildings and entered that paradise of the red man—the low, beamed trading store. Curiously I gazed around. The shelves literally groaned beneath a miscellaneous assortment of blue and scarlet strouds, gay tartans that would have knocked a Scot's eyes out, gingham, gaudy silk scarves, glittering dime-store "diamonds" and trinkets of all kinds; box upon box of the lovely silk thread the native women use for their colourful embroidery; tea, dried apricots, prunes, twists of black tobacco, and ammunition enough to start a fair-sized war. Depending from the beams were rows of gleaming copper kettles, the type so popular on the trail since they could be nested one within the other—and now no longer obtainable—while, stacked along one wall in orderly array, there were scores of guns from ancient muzzleloaders to modern breechlocks.

Leaving my husband to conduct his business with the factor, I ascended the wide, creaky stairway with its well-worn treads and entered the odoriferous loft piled high with Hudson's Bay point-blankets, caribou skins, dried meat, snowshoes, dog-harness, strings of bells and other appurtenances to northern travel. In one corner, depending from the rough-hewn beams, were glossy silver foxes, marten, mink and the pelts of other forest animals strung in different lots.

I could never stand the rancid odour of these raw furs, especially that of mink, and saw so many of these skins at the various posts that I became quite cold to even the most beautiful pelts, partly from the nauseating odour and partly from the cruelty that attended the trapping of them.

Caught in the jaws of steel traps, many of the poor creatures died a long and agonizing death by slowly freezing, though some survived till a merciful club on the head as the Indian visited his traps periodically brought a welcome release from suffering. Sometimes, as the animal's leg froze in the trap, it would gnaw it off and make its escape, leaving only the detached paw in the trap, perhaps to be caught again later. ✓

Each spring the skins were piled in the fur-press in ninety-pound lots and tightly compressed ere being baled for shipment. By sternwheeler, *batteaux*, York boat and other craft they were finally gathered from all the down-river posts at the end-of-steel and despatched to distant London where, twice a year, at the Company's fur sales they were disposed of to buyers from all parts of the world to be manufactured into the finished articles that would grace the necks of beautiful women in the capitals of Europe and the North American continent, very different commodities from the raw furs I had seen hanging in the Company's fur lofts. ✓

Scattered beneath the small-paned window, I discovered a pile of ancient Hudson's Bay *Journals*, all stained with the grease of caribou-tallow candles and the fingerprints of clerks long dead, a veritable gold mine for the historian which carried me back into the dim reaches of the past when life was real and earnest with a vengeance, and even cannibalism was not unknown:

They, the Crees, (my eyes struck an entry dated May 22, 1831) bring intelligence that Moussitoussicapo is at their tent having lately joined them without his family of two women and two children. From his frequent prevarications when questioned by the other Indians they suspect he has murdered and devoured them. ✓

It struck me at the time that these records had no business being there, scattered around as though of no

consequence; that they should be in the Company's archives in London. Later, I understand, some of them were retrieved. However, thanks to crass carelessness, a great deal of valuable, irreplaceable, historical data has been lost for all time.

After a stroll through the settlement, which seemed to be part of another century, I passed the sundial erected by Sir John Franklin, the explorer, and reached the scow to find all in readiness for our departure, and our "Love Nest" but a memory. Most of the freight, including the sacks of flour and the bedspring, had been toted ashore here.

Leaving Fort Chipewyan, we headed for the mouth of the Slave River. Slipping past the mile-wide mouth of the Peace, I was electrified by the sight of three huge buffalo bulls browsing casually within a stone's throw of our craft.

"Wood buffalo!" Phil explained. "The woods are full of them. There are about two thousand wandering around in the Buffalo Preserve, the last of the herds which used to roam west to the Rocky Mountains. They're protected by the Mounted Police but," he chuckled, "the Indians *have* to kill them once in a while . . . in '*self-defence*'!"

That night the floodgates of heaven opened and a drenching rain forced us to tie-up to the bank and rig up the tarpaulin as a protection from the storm. In the dim spaciousness of this canvas tunnel we bedded down on top our trunks and I found myself wedged in between Phil, Walter Hale, Slim and Vernon West, to the vast amusement of two broad-hipped squaws who had boarded the scow at Fort Chipewyan to visit their "brudder" in Fort Fitzgerald. What with badinage, laughter, crashing thunder, and the sloshing rain which pelted through the tarp onto our faces, sleep was impossible. Finally, Walter

suggested a cup of tea and the inevitable game of bridge. Thus the night passed.

Late the following afternoon, as we rounded a forested bend of the swift-flowing river—still buffeting our way through increasingly heavy ice—we spied, through the curtain of driving rain, the squalid trading post of Fort Fitzgerald with its long, muddy waterfront littered with up-rooted trees, broken scows, rotting canoes and other rubbish, and lined with a number of ramshackle shacks and log cabins belonging to the Caribou Eater tribe. Formerly called Smith Landing in honour of Donald Smith, later Lord Strathcona, it had been renamed Fort Fitzgerald to commemorate the memory of Inspector Fitzgerald of the Royal North West Mounted Police who perished on the Dawson Trail in 1911 with his entire patrol.

“Well, Mrs. Godsell, here we are at last,” exclaimed Colonel Hale. “Welcome to the land of *‘Improved Scotchmen!’*”

“Improved Scotchmen!” I gazed at him questioningly.

“Yes!” his eyes crinkled in a smile. “A polite name for the half-breeds!”

Perched high on the hill behind the white-painted buildings of the Hudson’s Bay post were the neat, red-roofed barracks of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Atop a high rock overlooking the Rapids of the Drowned, the only obstruction to navigation in some two thousand miles of waterways, was a stark white cross erected to the memory of a couple of priests who had lost their lives in the boiling flood, which holds for all Eternity that which is caught on its bosom. Whilst I, later, received peremptory orders from my “lord and master” to keep away from the rapids their savage, white-capped turbulence always fascinated me and, almost daily, I would hike through the woods to my favourite spot and jump, three feet, onto

a flat rock where, surrounded by leaping waters, I would watch the flight of the world's most northerly nests of Pelicans.

Snaking along the shore, out of reach of the tenacious current which would have swept our craft into the maw of the sixteen-mile stretch of rapids, we pulled into the bank at the foot of the Company's post. A crowd of swarthy Indians and half-breeds eyed us inquisitively as they huddled atop the rocks, paying me particular attention for, between Fort McMurray and the Arctic, there were less than a dozen white women in all, apart from a handful of nuns, so each new one was a curiosity.

"Hey, SLIM!"

I glanced up to see three khaki-clad figures dashing down the trail.

"*Slim*—you old son-of-a-gun!" they cried in unison. "It's sure good to see you!"

They were Constables Bob (better known as "Rags") Baker, Grinstead and Pennyfather, and I had to smile as I watched them wending their exuberant way up the trail to the barracks after Slim had introduced me by holding my arm aloft and stentoriously singing "Here Comes the Bride"!

Exuding cold disapproval, a drab, colourless little woman stepped forward with extended hand. "I'm Corporal Blank's wife," she simpered as she eyed me up-and-down, evidently not altogether liking what she saw. "Would you like to come up to the barracks to see the murderer, Albert Lebeau?"

"The . . . the *murderer*!" I stuttered, feeling suddenly sick at the grisly invitation.

Before I could utter another word George Bremner, the Company's factor, pushed her rudely aside. "Mrs. Godsell," he fixed her with a cold stare, "is going nowhere except up to the post with me and her husband for a cup

of hot tea. Good-day! That damned woman makes me sick," he growled. "You'd think poor Albert was a freak in a side-show the way she acts!"

Our brand-new, eight-roomed house was, by far, the largest and most modern in the entire country. Built at exorbitant cost by Jimmy Wise, John James Louttit's Aberdonian brother-in-law, as a "proper" background for his newly-attained rank of Inspector, the house had hardly been finished when he was demoted to factor again and placed in charge of Fort Smith, across the Portage. This was a never-ending source of bitter jealousy to Mrs. Wise and the whole Louttit family, a feeling also shared by Mrs. Blank, who had been a bosom friend of hers when she was at Fort Fitzgerald.

Situated atop a rise overlooking the main part of the settlement it also afforded a magnificent view of the Slave and Dog rivers. Furnishing it, however, was quite a task. Apart from locating in the warehouse three beds, bureaus and commodes, a dining-room suite, an old-fashioned couch, a large desk and a number of wicker chairs, consigned to down-river posts, there was just nothing. Collecting all the packing-cases and wooden boxes I could find, I set John James Daniels, our choreman, and a couple of other Indians, to work. For days they hammered and sawed and nailed until, at last, I had quite an assortment of bookcases and small tables. Since neither paint nor varnish was obtainable my next problem was—what could I use to finish them?

Browsing around the trading store, I discovered a large quantity of permanganate of potash. Here was the answer to my prayer! Fashioning a "brush" with cotton batting, unbleached cotton and a strong stick, I dissolved the crystals in hot water and set to work. The resultant brown stain was a long way from French polishing nevertheless it was quite satisfactory. Then, between turning large

Paisley-patterned handkerchiefs into cushion-covers, fashioning drapes from gay, floral prints, strewing bearskin rugs on the polished floors and filling the bookcases with books and bric-à-brac I soon had the house cosy and attractive. This done, Phil and I arranged his vast collection of Indian beadwork, quillwork, scalp shirts, eagle-tail headdresses, tomahawks and other relics around the walls. It was vastly different from the home I had left in civilization but nonetheless attractive and typically northern. As a matter of fact, thanks to our Indian relics, which always attracted a great deal of interest, I eventually found myself living in a sort of museum; for seldom did anyone entering the country fail to pay us a visit to see them. Eventually, this same collection became the largest private one in the Dominion.

When my husband remarked in Winnipeg that he wasn't going back north without me because he was "sick of squaw cooking" he little realized just what he was letting himself in for at *my* hands. Apart from being able to turn out a batch of fudge, sandwiches and the odd fancy cake — the usual girlish accomplishments — I knew just nothing about cooking. All I *did* know was how things should look and taste but to accomplish this end was another matter. Added to this, there was very little choice in those days as the post's supplies covered a very narrow range, consisting principally of basic articles such as flour, tea, sugar, canned salt butter, bully beef, sow-belly and the inevitable *beans*, with such "luxuries" as desiccated vegetables that were absolutely useless, dried apricots and peaches which were almost mummified, and rancid bacon that looked as though it had come from King Tut's tomb. To augment these uninteresting rations, Phil had purchased a hindquarter of beef in Edmonton and a small case, each, of apples and oranges.

One morning, whilst in the midst of settling the house,

my husband suggested a tin of Boiled Dinner for lunch. The label read: "Place in a pan of hot water and heat thoroughly." The dining-table set, I lifted the can from the water and plunged an opener into the top. *Swoosh!* The confounded thing exploded in my face and I ran into the front room, a ring of onion dangling from one ear and my tears making trails in the hot gravy which smothered my face. It was too much for Phil's sense of humour. Instead of extending the sympathy I expected he roared with laughter and told me in future to always punch a hole on either side of the lid before heating to let the steam out.

But this was as nothing to the way he did laugh a few days later. I asked him what he would like for dinner so he suggested rice soup, bully-beef, and apple dumplings for dessert. "By the way," he looked almost dubious, "*can* you make apple dumplings?"

"Of course I can!" I retorted a little tartly.

When all else was lined up I went to work on the dumplings. Not knowing how to make pastry, I stirred up a biscuit dough, in the process of which I decided the quantity of baking powder was totally inadequate for the amount of flour specified in the recipe so, gaily and with generous hand, I piled in more. Then, when rolling out the dough, I came to another conclusion. The apples would have to be *sliced* in order to cook properly!

When I opened the oven door an hour later I almost fainted for, staring me in the face, there were three monstrosities—each twice the size of a plum pudding—instead of the apple-sized dumplings I expected to see. And, they were heavy as lead! Placing them on a platter, staggering under their weight, I deposited them on the dinner table. Limp with laughter, Phil attempted to cut one only to have the dough compress under the spoon and bounce back like a rubber ball. When he inserted the

point of a knife the "dumpling" collapsed in a soggy, steaming mass which sported bits and pieces of gooey apple—which he carefully extracted and served as "sauce."

That was bad enough! But my most embarrassing moment arrived when, one afternoon, Mrs. McLellan and several other ladies dropped in for tea and I served coconut rock-cakes. As Mrs. McLellan nibbled daintily, but unenthusiastically, upon one of them Phil emitted a sudden howl: "Good God! My mouth is full of *soap-suds!* How is yours?"

"The same," laughed Mrs. McLellan, placing the offending morsel upon her plate. "I'm just about ready to blow bubbles!"

Later, I learned the coconut had been packed along with bars of Fels-Naphtha soap by some oaf in the Winnipeg Depot, and that the carton had been thoroughly soaked in the bottom of a leaky scow.

It was at this time, apart from learning to cook—in a fashion—I also learned my first lesson in Indian psychology. Naturally, no one had running water in their homes, every ounce having to be hauled by pails from the river until the forty-four-gallon barrel was filled, whilst the woodbox had to be replenished every day. Incidentally, in the spring and fall, when the water was rising and falling, we had to wait till the mud settled at the bottom of the barrel before we could use the water.

One morning, as a result of a home-brew hangover, John James was late. When he finally appeared, around eleven o'clock, I ordered him to get busy at once. Slinging the pails at the end of the neckyoke he disappeared down the trail, to return an hour later, empty-handed. Again I spoke to him. When, for the third time, he failed to do my bidding Phil told me to tear into him and give him "hell."

"He's just trying you out," he remarked. "Wants to see

how far he can go with you. It's a typical Indian trick. Give him *hell*," he reiterated. "If you don't master him now you never will!"

Never will I forget the look of stupefaction on John's face when I finally sailed into him. Although almost big enough to eat me, he simply burned up the trail between the house and the river. Filling the barrel to overflowing, he then dived for the woodpile and loaded the huge box until it wouldn't hold even an extra sliver.

From then on, on my husband's advice, I gave him what-for on an average of once a month. Often I had to *make* an excuse for doing so. At first this seemed rather mean but I soon learned, as everyone does who handles Indians, that it was the only way to keep him in line. As a result, John James would, ever after, have gone to Hades and back for me if I had told him to do so.

On occasion, when John Jamès was busy with other things, Augustine Mercredi took over the chores. Usually, when he finished, I would discover a batch of cookies or a pie missing from the cupboard. Finally, getting fed up, I decided to punish him. By this time I had learned to make pastry. Rolling out a crust, I filled it with scraps of fish, meat, gravy and what-not, then topped all with half a tinful of cayenne pepper and set it in the oven to cook. When done, I opened a slit in the upper crust and poured in more red pepper. Phil said it had the most appetizing aroma of any pie he had ever smelled! Next day, I placed the pie in a conspicuous spot then left the kitchen. Returning some time later, I found Augustine had departed and—so had the pie! An hour passed then John James, howling with laughter, entered the kitchen. "Wah! Wah! Mrs. Godsell. . . dat damn Augustine, him no steal no more pies!" His face was streaming with tears of mirth. "*Him!* Right now him hab his mouf wide open in de water barrel—tryin' to put out de fire!"

Mean? Yes, but necessary. Along with the other natives, he was just seeing how far he could go with me. Needless to say, I had no more trouble along those lines for the *moccasin telegraph* carried the word far and wide.

One afternoon we crossed the eighteen-mile portage to Fort Smith, diminutive capital of the Northwest Territories, where I met the Conibears, old-time opposition traders, and the various members of the Government Exploration Party: Cliff and "Bunny" Cuthbertson, Gordon Cummings, Mr. Phillipps, Hugh Brownlee, Bill Hardisty—a member of the Lord Strathcona family, and brother of Lady Lougheed of Calgary—Mr. and Mrs. Tedcastle and, last but not least, the genial, courtly Major Lockie Burwash, an old Yukoner who had recently been appointed Commissioner of the Northwest Territories. Immediately, I sensed a distinct coldness between the young and strikingly beautiful Bunny and the sharp-featured, vinegary Mrs. Tedcastle—a self-appointed keeper of public morals, and housekeeper for the group—who went to great lengths to impress upon me in cold, incisive tones that she was the "Social hostess for Government House"—an ugly, sprawling, storey-and-a-half log building, painted a rusty-brown, which looked more like a barracks than the official residence of a representative of the Government.

As a matter of fact, this "Government House" business had created somewhat of a situation in the fort since Mrs. Gerald Card, wife of the Rev. Gerald Card, the Indian Agent, insisted that—since they had been in the country since 1906—*their* house was Government House. It had been Government House for years before any of the Major's party had ever seen the Athabasca and—*Government House it was going to remain!*

With *two* Government Houses in a settlement compris-

ing a few sprawling Indian cabins, a couple of picketed trading posts and the Roman Catholic Mission, with half a dozen cliques all warring with each other, and with two ladies in the party whose ways and ideas of life were divergently opposite, Fort Smith became the subject of ridicule from the end-of-steel to Fort McPherson.

Visiting the Grey Nuns Hospital, which glistened like a mirror inside, the Mother Superior, a charming English woman, showed me around and then took me into a small ward where an aged squaw sat cross-legged upon a low cot making intricate figures with a long piece of string.

"A trapper," she explained, "found the poor soul in a small tent in the forest last winter and brought her to us to be cared for. Life is, indeed, hard for these people." Her voice was filled with compassion. "Too old to travel with the band, they had abandoned her. When found she had neither food nor fuel. The weather was bitterly cold and, but for the fortunate appearance of the trapper, she would have died in a few days. She is well over a hundred," she went on, "and is blind, deaf and dumb!"

I gazed compassionately at the poor soul's straggling snow-white hair, pitifully emaciated form and crinkled parchment-like features, then stepped impulsively forward and patted her on the shoulder. Raising her head, the old lady's face wrinkled in a wide, toothless grimace; then her talon-like fingers explored my cheeks. Seemingly satisfied, she clung to my hands and bounced up and down like a happy child. On my way out, my eyes blinded with tears, I placed every cent I had with me in the Poor Box at the door.

Wending our way through the stately pines which adorned the large parklike grounds surrounding the Indian Agency—now Mounted Police Headquarters—we were warmly welcomed by Mr. and Mrs. Card, whose colourful home reflected her innate artistry at every turn.

Keeping to themselves, as they did—with their only child, Katie, down East at school—they were rather lonely, for most people in the fort were a little afraid of their dignity and outward reserve, but I found them delightful, extremely kind, and gifted with an appealing sense of humour.

The friendship established that day has remained firm all through the years. Having first gone north to Fort Simpson in 1906 with her husband, a journey which entailed travelling a thousand miles by scow from Athabasca Landing—there was no *Muskeg Limited* then—Mrs. Card understood all the lonely heartaches a white woman experienced in that land. Thus I found myself, ever after, enjoying their hospitality during the long weeks my husband was off on the trail. Literally, and figuratively, they simply adopted me. During the summer months, Katie would return from Bishop Strachan School in Toronto, a refreshingly clean-minded and mischievous youngster as full of fun as a kitten but having, withal, beneath this the sterling character of her parents. The only white girl of her age in the country she was, truly, "The Sweetheart of the North," and still holds an affectionate niche in the hearts of all old Northerners. When she departed in the fall for the next school term a light seemed to go out.

Just as we were about to have tea a short, small-boned man in crumpled navy blue suit and moccasins entered the room. His emaciated face was bronzed and tanned. His entire mien was that of one completely indifferent to personal show or public opinion but his eyes fascinated me. Deep-set, blue and bloodshot, there was something wild and uncanny about them, and they seemed to glitter with an almost unnatural brilliance. They were not the eyes of lonely leadership but rather of one who had been

just plain *bushed* too long! The moment I saw him I disliked him intensely.

When he spoke with that mellow Oxford accent, I realized this must be Jack Hornby, of whom I had already heard so much.

He acknowledged the introduction with a courtly bow, as though he were in a London drawing-room, then seated himself beside me and started to stare as though I were some queer species just escaped from a zoo. Tea over, we were seated alone for a few minutes. Not a word was spoken then, suddenly, he exclaimed: "I don't like you!"

"Really, Mr. Hornby," I replied coldly, "your likes and dislikes are of not the *slightest* interest to me!"

Rising, I walked out onto the veranda. Evidently he was still smarting under my husband's refusal to give him an outfit of goods on credit to take into the Barren Lands since there was no one there with whom he could trade!

That was the only contact, socially, I ever had with Jack Hornby, the now-famed "Hermit of the Barrens," and I little thought at that moment of the ghastly tragedy which was to write *finis* to his earthly activities a few years later.

Upon our return to Fort Fitzgerald, Inspector and Mrs. Percival dropped in to pay their respects, both of them simply oozing forbidding formality. At the little barracks on the hill, I had learned, the Inspector reigned in arrogant and lofty langour, like a Pukka Sahib, deeming the rest of the small community beneath his notice, whilst his raven-haired, sharp-featured wife, Constance, the very personification of the typical English governess—which, rumour had it, she had been—surrounded herself with frigid austerity. They were the type of English who merely tolerated "people in trade" and I wondered why we had been thus "honoured." It was soon obvious. The

Inspector, so he informed us, was a Cambridge man, a fact which, all too obviously, rested heavily upon his shoulders, whilst my English husband had attended the ancient and exclusive Gothic-arched Wolverhampton Grammar School, thereby becoming a Wulfrunian. An elevating point, indeed! Despite the fact that Phil had forgone the higher learning at Oxford to spend his life in the wilds, exploring, and trading with the red men, Percival, it appeared, was quite prepared because of this background to accept us into their exclusive circle of *two*!

So intensely did the troops dislike the Inspector, and despise his indolence, that they were always poking fun at him.

"I've got a new chore today," Slim MacDonald barged in one morning, his face bisected with a wide grin.

"Oh!" I said.

"Ycah! Washing poor old Roland's bed-sores!" he roared with laughter.

By this time Mrs. McLellan, wife of the Northern Trading Company's post-manager, and her daughter, Edra, had formed the habit of dropping in for the evening, as also did the police boys—who seemed to thoroughly enjoy the change from their monotonous barracks routine. Inevitably, Mrs. Blank would appear the following morning to find out what we had been doing but she got no satisfaction. Then, ere departing, she would borrow almost everything I had except the kitchen stove. I resented this but, realizing we were but a handful of whites in the settlement, I complied as graciously as I could in order to avoid unpleasantness even though I was always forced to go to the barracks and retrieve my property.

"Mrs. Godsell!" She bounced in one afternoon and handed me two enormous paper bags. "Fill these up with apples and oranges right away. We haven't had any fresh fruit for a year."

I was completely flabbergasted then, inwardly boiling, I explained I didn't have enough to fill her bags, and that, were I to do so, there wouldn't be enough left for ourselves.

"You've no right," her face was livid with anger, "taking the Company's supplies up here to your house and depriving the public!"

"Those 'Company's supplies,' as you call them," I eyed her frigidly, "are *not* Hudson's Bay property. My husband purchased them in Edmonton with his own money. However, despite your abysmal rudeness, I'll *give* you a dozen of each for I can't spare any more. Surely *that* should satisfy you!"

Without a word of thanks she snatched up the bags and fruit and slammed out, to collide blindly with Dick Johnston, who had been cutting up a quarter of beef for us in the warehouse.

"Sa-ay!" he drawled nasally, "did you tell that battleaxe she could have six roasts, a load o' steaks an' . . . well, jest about all your meat?"

"I most certainly did *not*!" I snapped. "Mrs. Blank came in a moment ago and *demande*d practically all that fruit there but nary a word did she utter about the meat. Why?"

"Wa-al, she came to see me an hour ago. Said you'd told her she could get all the meat she wanted. Said she'd take an eight-pound roast home for supper but," he ended, "I jest told her to go plumb to hell!"

"Dick!" I was still seething. "I don't want to quarrel with her. Give her a couple of roasts and four steaks to shut her up."

"You'll be sorry," Dick opened the door. "If you're not damned careful she'll have your hide along with everything else you own if you don't call a halt. Why in hell,"

he spat viciously, "can't the damned police buy their own grub same's you do?"

Slamming the door, he disappeared down the trail, leaving me wondering what the score really was. Already I had heard rumours about the lady's foibles and hyperborean rectitude. Of how she considered it the essence of indecency for a woman to have more than her face and hands protruding from her dress; of how she gossiped and of how, already, she had had plenty to say about the way I conducted myself, dressed and "painted" my naturally red lips. Somewhat amused, and being extremely impatient of gossip, I had put the whole thing down to boredom born of isolation and too long contact with the same people. But—I *didn't* know my Mrs. Blank, nor the manner in which my kindnesses were to be repaid!

Daily, the ice ran thicker in the river. Biting winds from the north carried snow flurries in their train and the nearby woods began to assume a sombre frown. John James was here, there and everywhere, banking-up the house and other buildings with earth as a protection against the Frost King, and mending dog-harness, snow-shoes and sleds in preparation for the long days ahead on the winter trail.

"I guess Albert Lebeau's all right now," remarked Constable Baker one evening. "He's supposed to be strung-up on November 1 but it's too late for another hangman to get down here now. Personally, I'm glad. I've taken quite a liking to the poor chap."

Poor Albert! His was, indeed, a tragic story. The previous fall, learning that furs were plentiful, he had decided to leave his job at the Mission at Fort Providence and go trapping. Late one cold night in the midst of winter the priest was awakened by someone pounding on the door. It was Albert Lebeau! His wife, he said, had killed herself—and the baby had died. Next morning, a

few hours before sunrise, Sergeant "Nitchie" Thorne of the Mounted Police was heading his dog-team along the trail to the Indian's camp deep in the woods. Rounding a bend, he suddenly started, then drew his team to a halt. There, almost at his feet, reposing on a bed of spruce boughs, and covered with a Hudson's Bay blanket, lay the frozen body of Marie Lebeau. Attached to a tree near the foot of the bed was a gun, the muzzle directed towards the head of the dead squaw. Tied to the trigger was a piece of line which passed around the bole of the tree into her hand. A bullet-hole in the forehead showed the cause of death while, in a deep drift, was the body of a newborn child.

As the Sergeant examined the body he found, to his complete astonishment, that there was *no corresponding hole in the blanket!* The whole thing was a frame-up! Further investigation disclosed that the woman had been struck over the head with a stick of firewood in the wigwam nearby and the baby, only a few minutes old, tossed out into the snow. Fearful of what he had done, the Indian had carried his dead squaw into the bush to make it look as though she had committed suicide. Then he hastened to the fort to report to the priest.

When the sternwheeled *Mackenzie River* arrived at Fort Providence the following July, Albert had been arraigned and tried for murder before a jury of trappers and traders. Pronounced guilty and sentenced to be hanged, he was taken up-river to Fort Fitzgerald, sublimely unconscious of his impending fate since Judge Lucien Dubuc of Edmonton had broken down and the whispered sentence had never been interpreted to him.

It was a heart-breaking story. Jealousy had been the cause of it all—and a white man near the fort had been at the bottom of all the trouble!

Bright and early one morning the *chug! chug!* of a

distant motorboat was borne on the frigid air. Looking out over the broad expanse of the ice-speckled Slave, we were amazed to see the diminutive *Nechemus*, with Dan Patterson at the wheel, dodging the floating ice-pans and heading for the post. Hardly had the bow impacted than a venerable-looking, grey-haired gnome in muskrat cap and mackinaw coat stepped ashore, his long white beard floating in the wind.

"Mr. Godsell," Dan edged up to my husband, "this is Mr. Wakelen from Lethbridge. He's come to fix up Albert Lebeau!"

Slim MacDonald and Bob Baker paled. Stepping forward, they saluted smartly and introduced themselves. "We'll escort you up to the Officer Commanding, sir!" Bob said, then marched ahead of Mr. Wakelen in stony silence.

With the hangman's arrival, Albert was whisked from the woodpile, where he had been working, to his cell and the Death Watch was, once again, set over him. "Who's him?" he asked plaintively as he saw the eighty-year-old stranger, who had replaced Ellis, bustling about.

"Just a trapper," Bob's face was drawn as he glanced at Slim. "Just a trapper!"

Next day the police wagon, carrying Inspector Percival, Wakelen, Bob and Slim, passed our house *en route* to the place of execution at Fort Smith. It was then, for the first and only time, I saw poor Albert Lebeau! Seated on the coil of rope that was to send him to Eternity, he was puffing nonchalantly upon a cutty pipe, completely oblivious as to what it was all about. He was, he thought, just going on a fishing trip with his good friends, the Mounted Police!

Never will I forget the drawn, haggard features of Bob and Slim when they returned on the night of the execution. It was their first hanging, and the poor, frightened

Indian had clung to each of them in turn as the gallows loomed before him, beseeching them, his *friends*, to save him. Stumbling up the rickety thirteen steps, he had thrown himself face down upon the trap in a paroxysm of abject terror, thinking he was to be jerked into the air like a rabbit on a springpole.

For years afterwards, when the wind soughed through the topmost branches of the two gaunt pines that had formed the pillars of the scaffold, superstitious natives swore it was Albert's anguished soul still crying out for mercy!

If anything further was needed to damn me in the eyes of Mrs. Blank it was the dinner party I arranged for Slim and Mr. Wakelen on the eve of their departure by dog-team for the Outside after the ice had set!

No sooner had the hangman and Slim departed than I accompanied my husband to Fort Smith. Emerging at last from the pine-scented woods, our *dog-carrioles* careened into the courtyard of the Hudson's Bay fort with its square of whitewashed, log buildings. A moment later Lockie Burwash appeared, his red face beaming good-nature, to inform us we were expected over at Government House to a dance being held in our honour that night.

Hungry as hunters, we entered the Postmanager's house and soon were seated around an oilcloth-covered table laden with a caribou roast, whitefish, bannock and salt butter, presided over by Jimmy Wise in his shirt sleeves. As his swarthy spouse, attired in a beaded, black satin dress and silk-worked moccasins, passed around steaming mugs of tea I glimpsed a veiled hostility in her dark, brooding eyes. On a massive sideboard that went ill with the garishly-painted walls, Coalport, Wedgwood, Crown Derby and other expensive china stood cheek by jowl with chipped-enamel plates and Indian beadwork, while trail-worn socks and moccasins dangled by the stove to dry.

Visiting the Outside for the first time the previous summer she had gone "white" on her red tribesmen and proceeded to put the noses of the local dusky "Joneses" out of joint.

I recalled, now, the story I had heard of her return to Fort Fitzgerald. She had delighted in parading along the muddy waterfront in all the glory of a black satin dress, a picture hat adorned with waving plumes and scarlet roses, and beaded moccasins. Discarding the traditional papoose-cradle, or mossbag, for a rubber-tired baby buggy, she pushed it proudly before her, protecting her swarthy features from the sun's rays with an enormous umbrella.

But, alas, the green-eyed monster was hard on her heels. As she strolled mincingly along the driftwood-littered waterfront one day she saw, bearing down upon her with carmined lips and a taunting grin, her arch-enemy, the *demi-mondaine*, Victoire Mercredi. But not the Victoire of shawl and moccasins. Instead, the Victoire she now beheld sported a "picture hat" of tar-paper, willow sticks and flaming rooster feathers in ridiculous imitation of her own. Aloft, she flaunted a "parasol" of willows and brown paper. And, on rickety wheels, she trundled before her a soap-box within which reposed a dummy upon whose countenance the features of Mrs. Wise's somewhat homely baby had been painfully exaggerated.

They met at the bridge! When the battle ended, rooster feathers, plumes, roses, tufts of human hair and shreds of intimate clothing littered the beach in all directions. Both the ladies sported "shiners" whilst, about them, surged a wildly-cheering mob. At that moment "Shorty" Jewell, a ragged, six-foot-six Cockney teamster who boasted that he had joined the Mounted Police at a time when their ranks admitted only "Gentlemen's sons," drove up in a rickety cart drawn by a couple of *shagannapi* ponies. Surveying the belligerents with a jaundiced eye,

he squirted tobacco juice onto a piece of torn finery and gave expression to an epigram that has become a classic in the North: "Gawd! *Aint this civilization hell!*"

As we entered the commodious living-room of log-walled Government House that evening we found the Major brewing a hot rum punch from a Yukon recipe dating back to the days of '98, while Hugh Brownlee, Gordon Cummings and the rest of the staff were laughingly drawing lots as to whom should be "ladies" for the occasion since the only women present were Mrs. Tedcastle, the beautiful Bunny Cuthbertson and myself.

To the strains of the latest gramophone records we tripped the light fantastic. The Major, his silvery locks framing his merry face, seemed to have the energy of a youngster despite his threescore years and entered into the spirit of the occasion with gay abandon. The soul of hospitality, he kept the rum punch circulating until the entire gathering, with the exception of the frigid Mrs. Tedcastle, was caught up in an atmosphere of conviviality.

"How do you get along with Mrs. Blank?" Mrs. Tedcastle inquired when we paused for breath.

"Quite well!" I replied noncommittally.

"Don't you know," she gave me a piercing look, "that she and Mrs. Wise are thick as thieves? That the Wises," she continued, "will never forgive your husband for moving them here to Fort Smith to get them away from the Louttit gang at Fort Chipewyan? *And*," she emphasized, "don't think Mrs. Wise hasn't gotten it in for *you* for occupying the big house at Fort Fitzgerald, where she figured on lording-it over the Indians."

"Well," I replied, recalling that look of veiled hostility in Mrs. Wise's eyes at dinner, "as long as she leaves me strictly alone there will be no trouble. *And*," I looked at her coldly, "for your further information, Mrs. Tedcastle . . . I abhor gossip!"

"Well," she bridled, "I have no interest in gossip either, nor in these people here. I have one *dear* friend, Mrs. Percival, and that's enough for me. She's the only *lady* in the country!"

Hugh Brownlee glanced over his shoulder at me and grinned.

"Ladies and Gentlemen!" Lockie was fiddling with a mysterious-looking black box from which dangled a number of cords attached to earpieces. "I have a surprise for you. This is a radio-telephone," he announced. "The first and only one ever brought into the North. If you will put on those headphones I'll tune in and we'll listen to a concert from Vancouver."

Adjusting the earpieces we waited. Soon our ears were assailed by a celestial artillery until it sounded as though the concentrated storms of the ages were imprisoned in that box. Then a series of squeaks that might have come from a mouse broke through the barrage.

"Isn't that marvellous, Jean?" beamed the Major. "That's the *Aria from Faust!*"

Brownlee cast me a covert glance of merriment.

"Listen!" Lockie held up his hand. A brain-shattering explosion caused me to whip the earphones away. "Did you hear that *applause!*"

"It's all yours, Major," Mr. Phillipps arose from his chair and made for the gramophone. "I still prefer *this!*"

Little, however, did any one of us dream that that little black box was the forerunner of the radio which, within a few short years, was forever to banish loneliness and isolation from the North and Arctic and revolutionize the lives of every trader, trapper, Mounted Policeman and Indian in the land!

4.

My Smallpox Dance

With the advent of Armistice Day, I decided to hold a dance and housewarming party. Rosa Mercredi, whom I had managed to engage as maid and companion, one of the finest and most outstanding native girls I ever knew, and Mary Larocque, whose husband, Louis, was cook at the barracks, took over the kitchen. Soon bannock, pies and doughnuts — fantastic amounts — were piled up like cordwood.

"Don't you think we are preparing too much?" I asked Rosa.

"Huh!" she grunted. "You don't know them Injuns, Mrs. Godsell. There'll be nothing left when they get through."

When the sandwiches were being made I insisted on cutting off the crusts to make them look dainty then, filling a basin, I would carry them outside and toss them upon the ground for the ever-ravenous huskie dogs, taking care to see that none were around as I did so. For, I had been warned by my husband to use every precaution when they were running loose—and never to feed them anything by hand lest I get it snapped off. Stepping outside with the last load, I noticed our team resting outside John James's cabin. Thoughtlessly, labouring under the assumption that, because they were hitched to the sled, they would stay put, I tossed the crusts upon the ground. Like lightning, before I could move, I found

myself surrounded by six huge, snarling, snapping wolfish animals who didn't care what their teeth closed upon.

Although utterly terrified, blind instinct, and blind instinct alone, caused me to suddenly lash out and swing the basin wildly in all directions. Armed with a whip, John James sped towards me, shouting hoarse commands, then Phil catapulted through the kitchen door, a stout billet of wood in one hand.

"RUN!" John's voice was shrill with fright when he finally managed to seize the snarling, slavering lead-dog as Phil heaved the sled to one side. And, run I did, fear lending wings to my feet.

Rosa and Mary, looking like death, caught me and helped me into the house, their sympathetic "*Wah! Wah's!*" being the last straw. I broke down and sobbed with unadulterated fear. But that didn't save me from my husband's wrath at my stupidity. As a matter of fact, although the realization didn't strike me until later, he was more frightened than angry. Nevertheless, he really gave me a dressing-down. If, for one second, he told me, one of those brutes had snapped and drawn blood it would have been just too bad for me. It was a decidedly unpleasant lesson on how *not* to handle huskies, and I have never forgotten it!

Vicious in the extreme, these dogs have been responsible for several heart-breaking tragedies in the North. Not very long afterwards Billy Pinsky's little daughter was so badly mauled at Fort Resolution that she died within a few hours. A little Indian girl at Hay River was killed by the dogs there in 1922, only her head being found later. Roy McDermott, the young son of the Hudson's Bay Postmanager at Fort Simpson, was set upon by Sergeant "*Nitchie*" Thorne's team and seriously injured, one cheek being so badly slashed that the eye was ever afterwards drawn to one side, whilst Margaret Clay, wife

of Sergeant Sid Clay of the Mounted Police, was attacked by a large horde of huskies at Chesterfield Inlet in the summer of 1924. They had just been transferred from the Mackenzie River country where Margaret, one of the finest women who ever lived, had been a general favourite.

Sid had just left on a patrol in company with Captain Mack of the Hudson's Bay Company and Margaret had gone for a walk, wearing leather shoes since her native-made *mukluks* were not yet finished. She was some distance from the barracks when the troops heard a deafening din. Seeing no sight of her, but noticing the huskies worrying something on the ground near the blubber house, Art Weibe and the boys sped frantically forward to find Margaret lying, face down, upon the rocks, the flesh already stripped from one leg and the ravenous dogs rending and tearing savagely.

Rescuing her, and carrying her back to the barracks, they managed, with the aid of the local priest, to successfully amputate what was left of her leg but the shock proved too much and she passed away forty-eight hours later—just two weeks before Sid returned. When asked what had happened all she could remember was that she had slipped and, next second, the dogs had piled on top of her.

"I'll never forget her courage," Art Weibe told me later. "From the moment she came out of the anaesthetic, realizing she was done for, she'd still smile and dictate little notes for Sid between times *apologizing* for all the trouble she had caused us. As you know, there wasn't much to her physically but her courage was colossal!"

Strangely enough, early in 1924, the Clays and ourselves were having dinner together one evening in Winnipeg. Sid seemed more thoughtful than usual. When he got me alone for a few minutes he asked if I would try and persuade Margaret to stay behind when he went to

Chesterfield Inlet and get a home together since, the following year, he would be retiring on pension from the Mounted Police. It was almost a plea.

"Sid," I asked as something struck me, "Is this your *only* reason?"

"To be truthful, Jean, it isn't. I've just got the damndest hunch!"

Despite my diplomatic best Margaret was adamant. She's been everywhere else with Sid all through the years, she told me, and was not going to let him spend his last winter in the North alone. If only she had listened!

Around nine o'clock on Armistice night John James stepped out onto the veranda of our house and fired several shots into the air, the signal that the dance was about to start. This amused me. "I've heard of shotgun-weddings," I laughed, "but this is the first time I've ever heard of a 'shotgun invitation' to a dancel"

Soon our guests trooped in. Half-breed and Indian girls in gaudy satin dresses and moccasins, Indians and squaws in beaded buckskin and tartan, opposition traders and their wives in their best bibs and tuckers, and the police boys the very essence of smartness in their attractive red serges—all exuding good fellowship and happiness. It was the first affair of its kind ever to be held in the North, and everybody was agog with anticipation.

No sooner had Billy Larocque and Augustine Mercredi tuned up their fiddles than the dance was on, the fiddlers beating a tattoo on the floor to the tempo of the music, a habit peculiar to every backwoods Paganini the length and breadth of the land. This always amazed me since, when I was studying the violin in the Old Country, it was all I could do to just *play* let alone indulge in these pedal acrobatics.

It was a gay and colourful gathering indeed, and the

house resounded to the *thump! thump!* of moccasined feet as our dusky guests pounded their way through the intricacies of the Red River Jig, the Eightsome Reel and other wilderness favourites, as well as the Handkerchief Dance, a sort of Old English Maypole affair executed with the aid of gaily-coloured silk bandannas, which were woven into a rainbow canopy over the heads of the dancers.

Not till dawn was breaking did the party end. It had been a lot of fun and I was delighted. However, my joy was destined to be short-lived. Before the week was out many of our native guests commenced going over like ninepins with a mild form of smallpox! Not till then did I learn that Billy Larocque was convalescing from a bout with the disease at the time the dance took place, and was scattering the germs around as he manfully plied his bow. Fortunately, they recovered without any ill-effects but, from that day to this, that show has been known as "*Mrs. Godsell's Smallpox Dance*"!

Winter was soon upon us in earnest. The days gradually became shorter and shorter till, by three o'clock in the afternoon, it was necessary to light the coal-oil lamps. At first, I found the long hours of lamplight somewhat trying but I soon got used to it. Outdoors, the trees and rock-ribbed ridges were buried beneath a mantle of shimmering whiteness, while the silvery tinkle of sleigh-bells and the *Yip! Yip!* of the huskies echoed constantly upon the still air.

Around the settlement the mud-chinked shacks, their sod roofs mushroomed with virgin snow, nestled cosily in the billowing drifts, white spirals of smoke curling lazily from their chimneys into the blue to float above the spiked tops of the brooding pines. With the orange glow of the setting sun picking out in silhouette the beaded buckskin of the hunters, the brilliant *tapis*, or blankets, on the backs

of the dogs, and the fluttering rainbows of ribbons on the standing-irons of the harness, the fort presented, for all the world, the appearance of an animated Christmas card. What a transformation from the grey drabness of the fall! But, the fingers of the Frost King probed everywhere. Despite John James constantly replenishing the huge wood-stoves until they panted, cherry-red, with heat, the water keg froze solid every night and the ice had to be chopped out in the morning with an axe, while bread and food froze hard as granite.

Indians were already trickling in from their traplines in the forest to barter beaver, bear and fox skins for fresh supplies of tea, sowbelly, flour and ammunition—silent, sardonic figures in their *capotes* of hairy caribou-skin belted at the waist with gaudy *L'Assumption* sashes.

Late one night, Dried Meat, one of the Company's Indian scouts, sneaked into the fort, his blue blanket *capote* matted with an icy breastplate from the bitter frost.

"*Gitche Okemow!* Big Master!" he grunted, a crafty look in his beady eyes. "Big Cheesé, him at de Caribou Eater camp, eight sleeps to de eas'ward. Him got'm plenty fur. Him say, you send'um grub an' him gib you eberv skin!"

"Meet me at the store at midnight," Phil ordered. "In the meantime—*keep out of sight!*"

There was one great advantage my husband had over the other traders, one they frequently resented, and that was—he had not only lived amongst the red men and known them intimately from Labrador to the Rockies, but he could speak a number of native languages, including Cree, the *lingua franca* of the fur trade, and could also read and write syllabic. Knowing this, the Indians seldom addressed him in English, preferring their mother tongue thus never did he require an interpreter. "*Tante Godsell?*" or "*Tante Gitche Okemow?*"—"Where's Godsell?" or

"Where's the Big Master?" they'd ask when they came to the door. "*Ne we wabimaw!*" "I want to see him!"

Around midnight Phil arose from his chair. "Come on, Jean," he smiled. "I'll show you another phase of a fur trader's life. The settlement is now asleep but," he admonished, "we'll still have to be very quiet going down the trail."

In company with Dried Meat and John James we sneaked into the dark and freezing store—we didn't dare to light a candle, nor start a fire in the stove, lest the opposition get wise—where an outfit of grub and trade goods was hurriedly gotten together. In utter silence—we didn't even dare to *whisper*—the goods were loaded onto the toboggans, which had been hidden behind the building out of sight of prying eyes; the dogs were hitched, and the bells on the harness stuffed with snow to keep them silent. Then, as though they too realized what it was all about, the teams inched slowly, silently, forward towards the river ice. Stepping furtively outside, Phil locked the door and together we stood beneath the star-laden sky watching the teams snaking over the rough ice until they swung into the dark maw of the Dog River and disappeared.

I was afraid to breathe, to even move, for fear I would break the spell. Momentarily, I felt as though the pages of the Book of Time had been turned back and I had stepped into the fur trade days of old with their knife-edged vigilance and cut-throat competition—into the very heart of the past which breathed of Samuel Hearne, Peter Pond, Alexander Mackenzie, the swashbuckling Nor'-Westers, and other Greats of long ago!

It wasn't until late the following day that the opposition traders learned, too late, the Hudson's Bay had stolen a march on them with this secret expedition.

"They're mad as hell!" Phil laughed when he came in for dinner.

With the advent of the cold weather, I had begun to notice a perceptible change in the attitude of the wives of the opposition traders. Despite the fact that they had accepted our hospitality on Armistice night I had become more and more aware of an intangible coldness whenever I met them, but that was as nothing compared with their reactions when word of this *coup* leaked out.

As I strolled along the waterfront one afternoon I met Mrs. McLellan and Edra.

"Hello!" I greeted them. "Let's hike as far as the saw-mill then return to my house for tea."

To my shocked amazement they merely stared coldly, shrugged and kept on walking—absolutely refused to speak to me! Unable to comprehend their actions, and hurt to the very depths of my soul, I sped back to the house and burst into bitter tears.

"What's the matter, old girl?" my husband inquired.

Between sobs, I explained, adding: "I just *can't* understand them. I thought they were my *friends*!"

"Don't worry," he put his arm around me. "They'll get over it. Jack McLellan's sore because I've slipped one over on him along with the other traders and now, as always, the damned women have taken up the fight!"

"Do you mean to tell me," I remonstrated, "that these people here mix business and social life to that extent? That the *women* interfere with the trading?"

"Unfortunately, they do," he replied. "The winter fur war, with all its bitter hatreds, has commenced. And, don't forget . . . *we're Hudson's Bay!*" he finished significantly. "Pay no attention. By open water everything will be pretty well forgotten."

"Not for my money!" I snapped, drying my tears. "They've broken their pick with me and it'll stay broken

from this day on. I don't interfere with your business affairs and I'm blessed if I'm going to be the victim of women who stick their noses in where they don't belong!"

Until then, I hadn't realized the peculiar forces by which I was surrounded. In these little northern fur forts one was completely cut off from the outside world after the last sternwheeler and scow left in the fall, and the few exiles, drawn from different strata of society—with widely separated ideas and viewpoints—were thrown into close and intimate contact, and what affected one phase of our existence affected the other in no uncertain manner. Under ordinary circumstances they would never have met, let alone mingled. Here, however, they were forced to rub shoulders week after week, month after month, with results which might have been expected. By Christmas, as a rule, half of them were not on speaking terms, and the place resounded with their quarrels which, owing to the interdependence of us all, affected everyone no matter how much one endeavoured to remain aloof.

Added to this was the fact that, like all big corporations, the Company had many enemies who, although they were only too eager and willing to avail themselves of the advantages of its credit, financial assistance and other facilities, hated their monopolistic and bureaucratic attitude. For, despite the surrender of their Charter, changed conditions, and the advent of more modern ideas, the Company was still a power in the land. Also, its officers and men, deep inside, still hated the opposition with all the bitterness of old. Talk about Lords of the North! They were still just *that*!

To further complicate matters, the Mackenzie-Athabasca region was dominated by a sort of feudal autocracy of half-breed families whose ancestors had, for generations, been a power in the land and they resented the fact that the changing times had necessitated my husband's

being sent in to modernize conditions and make changes which, inevitably, would react upon themselves. Like all old-timers in this country they wished it to remain as it had been. Sparing neither calumny nor effort to retain their threatened supremacy, their intrigues and malicious gossip were not without effect upon many of the whites who had shared in the favours they had been able to dispense. These intrigues, combined with the unrelenting battle for fur supremacy waged through my husband against the opposition traders, had created a situation which held endless complications. For, as Phil had pointed out, the North was unable to differentiate between social life and business ethics. As a result, I had to be on the *qui vive* at all times lest even my most innocent remark be deliberately misinterpreted and be used against both the Company and ourselves. Later, I was amused when one of the women remarked: "I don't know what to make of Mrs. Godsell. *She never knows anything*. Either she's awfully dumb or awfully damn wise!"

As the mercury in the thermometer crept lower, and trees split asunder with the intense frost, everyone seemed to den up, even the dogs, and life became one of utter isolation.

In the midst of preparing for his winter inspection trip around Great Slave Lake, Phil was taken suddenly ill and nothing I did seemed to help. Daily, he grew gradually worse until I was almost frantic with worry. When Dr. MacDonald of the Indian Department, a kindly but rabid Scot from Glengarry, Ontario, who had been in the country for years, finally arrived in the fort I corralled him.

"It's typhoid fever," he told me. "About the worst case I've ever seen. I'll have to be frank," he rested his hand upon my shoulder. "I'm somewhat dubious about the outcome."

"You don't mean. . . !" Words failed me.

"Everything will depend upon the nursing," he remarked gravely. "Even at that it will be a miracle if he pulls through!"

Extracting a dozen small, white pills from his vest pocket—his ever-handly "dispensary"—along with a few small squares of paper, he blew the tobacco dust off them and then proceeded to powder them with a small glass vial, twisting each paper into a package and setting it aside as it was completed.

"Just a moment!" I remarked. "Let me get you something in place of that vial. I'm afraid it will break!"

No sooner were the words out of my mouth than it did!

"*This* I'll throw out," I said, reaching for the package containing the splinters.

"That's all right," he said. "There's no use wasting it!" Picking out the splinters he could see with the naked eye, he screwed the paper up and added it to the rest.

Retrieving the package when his back was turned, I left the room. I realized only too fully what lay ahead of me in the weeks to come, and a dose of ground glass was hardly likely to help the situation. But nothing ever worried the doctor. He had been in the North so long he scorned the elemental principles of hygiene and even ordinary care and I have known him to go from a case of virulent infection to an accouchement without even bothering to wash his hands yet, miraculously, his patients usually recovered—apparently more from Divine intervention than anything else. However, despite his outward casualness he was kind-hearted to a degree.

"I'm leaving for the Dog River country," he said, slipping into his *ahtegi*. "There's an epidemic of 'flu and smallpox raging amongst the Caribou Eater Indians. I'll see you in a few weeks. In the meantime, give your husband one of those pills in the morning; a glass of fresh milk three times a day—adding a beaten egg to his noon

ration. Also, sponge bathe him every hour with tepid water then give him a rub-down with alcohol and camphor." Next moment he was gone.

Where on earth, I wondered, could I possibly obtain such luxuries as fresh eggs and milk in the heart of the frozen wilderness? Sinking into a chair, I momentarily gave way to tears. The isolation and complications of life at this lonely fur fort had seemed but a small part of a great adventure as long as Phil was on his feet. Now, with him desperately ill, I realized how utterly alone and helpless I was. There wasn't a soul within five hundred miles, it seemed, to whom I could turn for help or sympathy.

The situation wasn't improved when, the following afternoon, Mr. Kelly, the porcine Irishman with the white eyelashes, arrived from Fort Chipewyan to succeed the Postmanager, George Bremner, who had decided that trapping would prove more lucrative than trading. For Kelly had come, completely antagonistic and prejudiced against us by John James Louttit's bitter and malignant hatred born of the changes that my husband's presence portended. My womanly intuition had not been wrong when I sensed John James' underlying hostility at Fort Chipewyan, and I realized I couldn't expect friendship from this source. In fact, I had no friends in the fort except the police boys who, of late, had been sent off on what they later maintained were quite unnecessary patrols in order to keep them away from us since Mrs. Blank had joined in the fur war and thrown in her lot with the opposition.

To further complicate matters, Rosa had walked out without warning and failed to return. There was just enough Indian in her to make her fearful of any form of sickness.

When things seemed blackest Barney Beyer, the banker

from Fort Smith, dropped in one afternoon with the generous gift of his last two dozen fresh eggs, and suggested that I get in touch with the Mother Superior at the Grey Nuns Hospital there. Losing no time, I sped down to the trading store and phoned our Postmanager at Fort Smith and asked him to contact the Mother Superior at once. In no time he called back to say she could spare me two dozen eggs and a bottle of camphor, but that she had no rubbing alcohol to spare. "As for milk," he added, "try Isadore Mercredi. He has one cow which is still milking."

Hurrying over to John James' cabin, I told him to hitch up the dogs and head for Fort Smith without delay. Half an hour later I watched his lithe, buckskin-clad figure loping behind his dog-team until it disappeared into the greenery of the pines, now heavily mushroomed with snow.

Late next day he returned, having been delayed by a blizzard that shrieked through the trees and seemed, at times, bent on tearing the house apart. Stepping into the kitchen on moccasined feet, he handed me the eggs and the camphor then placed a heavy sack upon the kitchen table. "*De milk!*" he exclaimed succinctly.

Opening the sack with trembling fingers, I discovered four blocks of frozen milk about twelve-inches in diameter and four-inches thick.

"Me nail-um box high up outside de door so de dogs dey can't get at it. You keep'um dere. Den," he suggested, "you cut'um off chunk wid de axe when you need'um an' thaw him out. De alcohol!" His eyes danced impishly. "You get'um from McElheney. Him mak' good home-brew."

Acting on John's suggestion, I hiked along the trail to the trapper's cabin, to be greeted with a roar of ribald laughter when I explained my mission. Obviously, for a

moment, he entirely misunderstood my request; then, realizing I was in deadly earnest—that it was an emergency—he agreed to run off a brew for me. I knew full well it was against the law but I was desperate.

“It’ll be ready in a few days, but I’ll have to be careful,” he remarked.

“If you’ll get me the dried prunes, apricots an’ apples, some yeast an’ a ten-pound bag o’ sugar I’ll sure as hell fix you up. If I bought all that stuff somebody’d get suspicious an’ tell the police—who hate my guts!”

True to his word, Mac sneaked into the house around 3 a.m., one morning. “Here’s your ‘moose milk,’” he grinned. “There’ll be more where this came from when you need it. All you’ve got to do is yell!”

Meanwhile, the fort was rapidly filling up. Every day yelping teams came careening in, urged on by swarthy Caribou Eater and Chipewyan Indians in beaded moc-casins, *capotes* of hairy caribou-skin, and huge deerskin mittens suspended from around their necks by colourful worsted cords, their crunching, squealing sleds laden with the furry wealth of the forests. Down at the trading store mahogany-faced braves and broad-hipped squaws bartered otter, fox, lynx and ermine for gaudy galap-laid, tartan shawls, kettles, guns, ammunition and trinkets.

From every squalid cabin along the driftwood-littered waterfront spirals of pearly smoke rose in serried columns high into the frigid air. Everywhere were signs of feverish activity for the forthcoming Christmas season, the nights being filled with the squeaking of fiddles and the *thump! thump!* of moccasined feet as the Indians danced and generally made merry. Added to the general din was the *boom! boom!* of tom-toms, denoting a gambling game was on in Louis Mercredi’s little log cabin across the trail. Then, from Fort Chipewyan, a black-cowled priest, new to the North, trudged in on snowshoes to hold Midnight

Mass in the small unpainted wooden church nestled on the riverbank.

No sooner did he arrive than Mrs. Phillip Mercredi offered him the loan of her newly-acquired organ, an ornate affair of fretwork, mirrors and scrolls which, she said, she would be pleased to play for him. The priest was delighted! Alack and alas! The organ had a leaky bellows, whilst Mrs. Mercredi's talent as an organist was confined to picking out, with one finger of each hand, a few scattered notes of "Beautiful Isle of Somewhere" and "God Save the King." When the bellows gave out with a tired sigh she waved gaily to friends and relatives in the congregation whilst pumping vigorously to get the organ working again. That poor priest! As time passed it became more and more obvious that his enthusiasm for music was reaching a lower, and lower, level. The louder he sang to drown out the hideous accompaniment the louder the starry-eyed squaw thumped out the scattered notes of her repertoire until, totally unable to contain themselves, the adherents crept quietly outside, one by one, to shatter the frigid silence with their convulsive laughter.

As Christmas drew near, and more and more Indians piled into the fort, Mr. Kelly became more morose and taciturn. We had been forced to give him a room in our house until he could find other quarters. His ignorance and repulsiveness were hard enough to bear but his uncouth behaviour, particularly at the table, his criticism of everything and blinding sarcasm, almost drove me mad. Being the complete mongrel, he was taking full advantage of the situation. Never did he attempt to fill the stoves for me no matter how bitter the weather, nor to help me in any way, while, thanks to his drinking home-brew with John James, the latter was becoming extremely difficult to handle.

One morning, it was 60° below zero outside, I entered the kitchen to find the water barrel empty, and nary a stick of wood in sight. Furiously, I threw on my *parki* and walked over to his cabin only to find Angelique, his blonde-headed squaw, equally as angry.

"Dat John James," she shrilled, her eyes flashing fire, "him no here. Him no home all night. Him *crazy* eber since dat damn *atimochisk*, Kelly, come here!"

Gathering up an armful of wood, my fingers almost freezing in the process, I managed to get the stove stoked up. When John James finally appeared, I gave him a blistering dressing-down. Without a word, his liquor-puffed face a stony mask, he walked out and proceeded to saw and split wood like a demon.

5.

Trials and Tribulations

One of the old accepted customs of Hudson's Bay life was to give the Indians and half-breeds a feast of bannock, doughnuts, pies and strong, sweetened tea, along with a plug of tobacco, on Christmas day so, at Phil's request, I made a special effort to follow this out despite his illness and the fact that I was inundated with work twenty-four hours a day. Fashioning ornaments from chocolate-box cups and the lead wrapping from tea packages, I decorated the tree John James brought in from the woods, arranged sprays of spruce around the house, and then piled gifts beneath the branches.

Hardly had the Christmas sun arisen like a ball of lambent flame over the snow-mushroomed pines than the house was invaded with a wave of coppery humanity, all smiling happily and yelling: "*Melly Knistmas! Melly Knistmas!*"

Everything went off beautifully until late in the afternoon when, the feast over, young Georgie Larocque burst in, eyes aflame and his small, yellow face contorted with anger. Tossing his gift contemptuously at my feet he snarled: "I doan wan' dem damn bow 'n arrers. You t'ink I'm damn Injun? ME. . . I'm wan' a gun like you gib Frankiel"

Angrily, I grasped him by the arm, made him pick up the offending gift, and pushed him out onto the veranda. "If you ever dare to speak to me like this again," I

snapped, "I'll thrash you. Do you understand? Now . . . get going!"

Wordlessly, he turned and fled down the steps, his eyes streaming with tears of chagrin.

Hardly had I turned from the door than Agathe Mercredi appeared with the parcel I had sent over to Rosa. "Mrs. Godsell," her eyes were glued to the floor. "Rosa, her doan like dis white blouse. She like *pink* better. You change it, huh?"

Dropping the parcel on the hall table she vanished, to be followed within a second by Dorothy Larocque, who also dropped her parcel on the table. "I doan wan' dis black-'n-white shawl. Me get'um one from de Northern Traders. You gimme me de money 'nstead!"

By this time I was almost in hysterics. The Larocques were a *tribe*, not a family. There were, literally, dozens of them and their abject poverty was a by-word throughout the land. When I bought the warm, woollen shawl in question I thought Dorothy would appreciate it since, almost up until Christmas, she had been shivering in a flimsy rag shot with holes. Now, here she was, in a thin cotton affair, turning my gift down!

"All right, Dorothy," I replied. "I'll see what I can do!"

A short while later, as I was warming some milk for Phil, John James entered the kitchen with a pair of patchwork quilts under his arm. "Mary Larocque," he chuckled, placing them on the table, "is sure mad as hell at you. Says if you tink she's so damn poor she's got to put dem patched-up rags on her bed, to be laughed at by Mary Dry Meat, Dora Ratfat an' all de odder squaws, you're *crazy*. She wan's de money 'nstead!" He placed a stick of wood in the stove. "Dem damn *Injuns*," his mahogany countenance wrinkled disdainfully, "dey doan know not'ing!"

"Well, John," I replied, "until today I didn't know

not'ing' either but I've learned a lesson. I'll never attempt to play Santa Claus to these wretched people again. And —*be sure you tell them so!*"

For a week the fun continued, the natives exhibiting their love of revelry in foot races, wrestling matches, dancing and dog-races, whilst young bucks, their tartan-clad sweethearts tucked on their sleighs, raced madly to and fro from cabin to cabin, yelling and shouting in a medley of English, French and Indian at their galloping teams, their long caribou-skin lashes whistling and cracking wickedly. With the advent of night they would hitch their dogs to nearby trees and enter Big Cheesé's shack. Ere long the throbbing of tom-toms rose and fell on the frigid air in a weird crescendo that sent chills up and down one's spine. Soon the whoops and shouts of the dancers mingled with the pagan refrain until, sensing something was afoot, every huskie in the settlement took up the challenge. Raising their pointed snouts to the purple velvet of the wintry sky, they gave vent to their feelings in a series of weird, blood-curdling howls which sounded like the souls of the damned in torment.

But I was in no mood to appreciate the celebrations. Phil had been growing steadily worse, and it was becoming more and more difficult to depend upon John James. The thermometer had dropped to 65° below zero and, daily, I had to almost fight with him to get the chores done, thanks to Kelly.

To my intense relief, the Doctor dropped in on New Year's eve. "How's the patient?" he smiled, patting me warmly on the back.

"I'm at my wit's end," I replied. "I've done everything possible but nothing seems to help despite my being on duty almost twenty-four hours a day. I do wish you'd go up and take a look at Phil."

Throwing myself upon the couch in the living-room I

broke down and sobbed, unable to help myself. So far I had fought a grim battle but, at that moment, I really weakened. Despite the fact that I was one of the five lone white women in the settlement, despite the wretched circumstances, not one of them had come near to even inquire about my husband let alone say "Can I help you?" Truly, the fur war, with its rabid jealousies and hatreds, bore bitter fruit! Many a lonely afternoon I had gazed through the windows at the wintry isolation by which I was surrounded to glimpse the other women tripping the trail together and longed, with all my heart, for even *one* woman to talk to.

"Tonight's the turning point," the Doctor spoke softly as he entered the room. Watch him closely. And, whatever you do, permit no noise around the house. This is New Year's eve. The Indians will be firing off their rifles to celebrate. When they come near chase them away. Your husband *must* have absolute quiet."

Sure enough, around twelve o'clock, there came a sudden volley of gunfire just outside the house, accompanied by wild whoops and blood-curdling yells. Racing outside, I called to the natives to go away.

"Wha' tha' hell!" Pat Mercredi, howling drunk on home-brew, was in an extremely belligerent mood. "You damn palefaces t'ink you own whole worl'. ME!" he raised his 30.30 and fired into the blue. "I'm for show *you*!"

Entering the house, I picked up my rifle and stepped back outside. "Pat!" I barked. "If you, and those men with you, don't move away from here *at once* I'll shoot you. Shoot the first one who dares to fire another shot!"

Trembling with trepidation, fighting to appear calm, I waited as they held a drunken palaver in a mixture of Chipewyan, pidgin English and Cree. The palaver ended, Moonias Jewell raised his rifle and sent a bullet into the

air to the accompaniment of the raucous laughter of his companions.

"*Bang! BANG!*" Quickly, I fired a couple of shots over their heads. Yelping with sudden amazement and fear they took off like a herd of frightened caribou, their moccasined feet pounding on the frozen ground as they raced towards the safety of the sawmill at the other end of the settlement.

Around twelve-thirty, as I watched silently beside his bed, my thoughts on other New Year's Eves when I had tripped the light fantastic without a care in the world, Phil passed the crisis. Opening his eyes he smiled wanly. "Would you read to me for a while, old girl?" he asked.

The following morning Kelly was in a decidedly bad mood. His albino face contorted with fury, he demanded to know *why* I had sent the Indians packing the night before. "John James Louttit at Fort Chipewyan told me all about *you* people," he snarled, his white eyelashes blinking. "I sent those Indians up here to fire off their guns last night. In future," he stepped towards me with clenched fists, "just don't you butt in on any more of *my* orders. *I'm* the Postmanager here!"

"*Your* orders be *damned!*" I was seething with anger. "From this day on, you craven coward, it will be a lot healthier for you to discount Louttit's libellous, unfounded and unwarranted prevarications. Also, to remember *you* are merely *one* of my husband's subordinates . . . *not* the *Gitche Okemow* you think you are. Now—*get out!*" By this time I was shrilling like a fishwife.

The payoff came a week later. My husband had just gone to sleep and I was in the kitchen, ironing. It was around 10 p.m. Suddenly the frosty air was blasted with terrorizing screams, shrieks and curses. The door flew open and a motley horde of drunken 'breeds and Indians surged in, headed by the decidedly belligerent Kelly—

who was in a hopeless state of intoxication. Shouting, yelling, cursing, they spilled from room to room; pushed the furniture around; kicked the stoves, bringing down the pipes; broke a lot of valuable china and then staggered out and headed for John James' cabin.

Sick with anger and fear, my eyes blinded with tears, I raced upstairs to find Phil attempting to get out of bed. "What's wrong?" he asked, trembling from head to foot, his face like wax.

"It's that miserable Kelly," I replied, tucking him back beneath the sheets. "Stay where you are. I'm going up to the barracks for help. You'll be all right. I'll lock the door when I go out."

In a blue funk, fearful of the dark and marauding animals, I slipped and stumbled over the uneven trail through the ghostly woods till the diminutive log barracks loomed up before me—my heart thumping with fright as, occasionally, a tree would split asunder with the bitter 60° below zero frost.

"I wish you'd do something about those Indians," my voice was quivering as I faced Inspector Percival in his living-room and told him what had happened. "They've been howling drunk for days now. Raising hell all over the place, *as you well know*."

"I'm afraid, Mrs. Godsell," he drawled lazily in his lofty Cambridge accent, "there isn't much I *can* do for you. After all . . . I" his voice trailed off.

"Aren't you an officer of the law?" I demanded. "Aren't you here to keep peace in the community—to prevent the public being inflicted, as I have been, with this drunkenness and debauchery? Or," I was trembling with anger, "are *you* merely here as a decoration?"

Without deigning to reply he arose angrily from his wicker *chaise-longue* and walked over to the barracks as though every step was physical labour. Returning within



Upper left: Summer group in front of wilderness home in Fort Fitzgerald.
Author in centre front.

Upper right: A Christmas visitor—a Cree hunter.

Lower: Philip H. Godsell in dog-carriage on 1,500-mile trip inspecting Hudson's Bay Company's forts.



Burial of Inspector Fitzgerald and the Lost Mounted Police Patrol at
Fort McPherson.

The stern-wheeler S.S. *Mackenzie River* on which the author travelled on her
2,600-mile return trip from Fort Smith to the polar sea.

Eskimo prisoners of Mounted Police at Fort McPherson. Tatamagama (second
from right) and Aligoomiak (fifth from right) were both executed a year later.

a few minutes he informed me coldly that Corporal Blank would handle the matter. It was all too obvious that he deeply resented having been disturbed.

Halfway back along the trail, the Corporal and Constable Baker passed me on the double, their very haste boding no good for someone!

The following morning my husband called Kelly into his room and I heard him laying down the law in no uncertain manner. "You've been taking advantage of the fact that I've been on my back," he roared. "The moment I get on my feet I'll give your entire behaviour a thorough overhauling and . . . *God help you!*"

When, a short while later, the wretched creature appeared in the lower hall his eyes were staring out of his head.

"He's . . . he's . . ." he stuttered as though in a trance, "*kicked me out*. Ordered me to go and den up in the Indian House and," his voice was filled with stupefaction, "he's threatened to fire me if there's any more trouble, or drinking, around the post."

Deflated, all his arrogance and bluster gone, he was positively abject and tearful—a nauseous sight. Somehow, the house seemed cleaner after he moved out.

Vainly, I waited for John James to appear only to learn, late in the afternoon, that he, and he alone, had been arrested and sentenced by the Inspector to a month's hard labour on the Mounted Police woodpile—the real culprits having been permitted to go scotfree!

The following week my life was a hell on earth. The weather was still bitterly cold and, thanks to having no choreman, I'd been forced to fend for myself. The old saying: "Needs must when the devil drives!" was beautifully exemplified that trip. How I ever, with no experience, handled the crosscut saw and the axe day after day without meeting with an accident I'll never

know but I managed, somehow, to fill the woodbox. Then, donning the neckyoke and slipping the pails on the hooks, I walked down to the river and chopped the ice from the water hole, making trip after trip until the water-barrel was filled to the brim.

One afternoon, worn to the point of complete exhaustion, I was struggling away, wrestling with the woodpile as usual, when George Bremner's kindly face appeared over the fence.

"What on earth are *you* doing there?" he ejaculated. "Where's John James?"

Briefly, I related all that had happened.

"Those rotten!" his face was livid with anger. "To play a rotten trick like this on a little woman like you. *They don't belong in the North!* Get into the house at once," he ordered. "I'll be back to take over as soon's I light a fire in my stove."

For over a week George stayed around and saw to it that I lacked for nothing, then McElheney arrived back from his trapline. He, too, hit the roof when he learned what had occurred.

"I'm gonna stick around an' look after you—even if it costs me my whole winter's catch," he exploded. "Go and get yourself some shut-eye," he ordered. "You look beat to death!"

I *was* exhausted, and worried too. The fresh milk supply had ended for Isadore's cow had gone dry and the sickeningly sweet condensed milk, which was part of our rations, never agreed with Phil. Needing no second invitation, I stretched out upon the living-room couch and, in seconds, was dead to the world. Several hours later I awakened and sniffed the glorious aroma of baking. Out in the kitchen Mac had been busy as the proverbial bee. Already he had a batch of bread on the way, and a mound of hot biscuits and cookies piled on the table.

"Oh! Mac—how wonderful!" I exclaimed.

"Look!" he beamed, pointing through the side window, "I've been an' done your washin' too. Don't it look pretty, eh?"

For a second my heart dropped into my shoes as I stared at the array of sheets, pillowcases, tablecloths, towels and silk lingerie hanging stiff and stark from the clothes lines—every single article streaked like a rainbow. With gay abandon, Mac had simply tossed everything into the machine regardless of whether it was colour-fast or not.

"Don't it look pretty?" he reiterated.

Realizing the kindly spirit behind the deed I turned and smiled at him, my heart filled with the deepest gratitude. "Truthfully, Mac," I said, "I've never seen a *prettier* wash in all my life!"

After all, he had done his best and, apart from George Bremner, he was the only living soul who had come to my aid since my husband had been taken ill. As the French so aptly say: *A friend is known in the time of need!*

Added to my other duties during this period, I had gone over all the Company's mail with my husband each time the dog-team packet arrived for, despite the Doctor's orders, he had insisted on keeping things running smoothly. In fact, it was vitally necessary that he do so since everything passed through his hands, and depended upon his administration. After taking dictation I typed letters, statements and reports, often sitting at the typewriter all night in order to catch the mail-packet before it departed for the north or south. Thus, nothing was ever held up. The Company's affairs were kept going without a hitch.

"The cow at the barracks freshened a few days ago," the Doctor told me one afternoon. "Hike up and see the

Blanks. Take your time. The change'll do you good. I'll stay here with your husband till you get back."

I hated the thought of this errand but Phil still had to have fresh milk.

"I don't know whether we can let you have any or not," Mrs. Blank's tone was icy when I explained my mission, adding that I would pay any price she asked for it. "Between the calf, the Percivals and ourselves I don't think we'll have *any* left over for you. Anyway, I'll see."

"Mrs. Blank," the blood drained from my face, and I trembled with anger when I recalled my past kindnesses to her, "you can *keep* your milk. I'd even see my husband dead and buried in the weed-patch you call a graveyard here before I'd permit one drop of it to pass his lips. Good afternoon!"

The Doctor was furious when I returned. "I've never heard of such a thing in all my life. After *all* that you have done for her. . . !" So boiling angry was he that he threatened to *force* her to supply the small quantity required, but I was adamant.

"Phil's over the hump now," I said. "We'll manage, *somehow!*"

Later, I learned that Mrs. Blank was not only feeding the calf its share of the milk, and supplying the Percivals with what they required, but was giving, *gratis*, two quarts a day to the McLellans. Yet, all I had asked for was sufficient to provide my sick husband with three glassfuls a day!

Shortly afterwards there occurred an episode that took my mind off my own troubles. As John James was filling the woodbox one morning he remarked: "Little Cheesé . . . him come to de fort at two 'clock dis afternoon!"

"How do you know?" I asked. "No one has been in from the woods since the hunters left after the New Year."

"Me!" he grunted, shrugging his shoulders. "I'm jus' know. Cheesé, *him come!*"

Despite my skepticism there had been a note in John's voice which impelled me to watch the river after lunch. To my complete amazement—at *exactly two o'clock*—a thin, dark line appeared at the junction of the Dog River and the Slave. In no time it resolved itself into a dog-team, with a little, mummylike figure struggling behind urging it on whilst a still smaller one ploughed ahead on snowshoes, breaking trail in the teeth of the frigid wind which swept the snow-covered hummocks and up-ended ice of the Slave. Throwing on my *ahtegi*, I hastened down the trail and joined the silent group assembled by the Company's post. No sooner had the team pulled up than the squaws covered their faces with their shawls and broke into blood-curdling howls and cries of lamentation.

"I'm tole you, Cheesé, him come two 'clock!" John James stepped up and spoke quietly.

"But—where is he?" I asked. "All I can see are those two little girls with the team!"

"Him dere. Him *dead!*" He pointed at a long, canvas-covered object lashed on the sled and turned to help the two tiny mites whose Oriental passivity under the circumstances completely floored me.

When Little Cheesé's wife had died of smallpox the previous fall he had taken his two little daughters, aged seven and nine respectively, back to his hunting grounds in the forested fastnesses of the Thekulthili Lake country, eight sleeps to the eastward, where they had fished, and snared rabbits for the pot while their father followed his trapline. Then one night, shortly after he returned to his tepee, he had succumbed to the Red Man's Curse—tuberculosis! With the inherent stoicism of their race, the tiny youngsters had faced up to their plight like veterans. Determined to have the priest at Fort Smith give him

Christian burial they had lashed their father's frozen body on the sled, hitched up the dogs and headed for the post, travelling eight days and nights through the wilderness; camping as dusk overtook them, completely fearless of wolves and other animals that might be prowling through the frozen thickets.

"Bob!" I turned to Constable Baker. "I'll never again question the power of the *moccasin telegraph*, as we whites so glibly term that psychic gift these natives have of being able to foretell, with such astounding accuracy, things which are about to happen—or have happened." I brushed the tears from my eyes. "Those poor little mites! This, truly, has been a revelation to me in more ways than one!"

No sooner was Phil allowed downstairs for a little while each day than he called in John James, a now thoroughly deflated and contrite Indian, to make arrangements for his inspection trip around Great Slave Lake before break-up. It was now the middle of February and little time was to be lost, he said, for everything pertaining to the spring trade and the requisitions for the following season's supplies depended upon this particular inspection.

Transportation being such as it was—with the aeroplane far in the distant future—all post and personal supplies had to be ordered a year ahead. If you overlooked anything you were simply out of luck and had to wait another year. As a result, all orders had to be made out with the greatest of care so that nothing would be overlooked. Then, when the supplies did arrive later in the season, we were forced to voluntarily ration ourselves to make them spin out over the twelve months period ahead. However, despite this, we sometimes found ourselves on short commons before open water — thanks to a late spring break-up—and I can still recall the time when, for over a

month, we lived on a straight diet of fish three times a day!

For the next few days all was bustle and activity. Phil's *carriole*, gay with brilliant red paint to impress the Indians, and adorned with the Company's crest, was hauled out and readied; the harness was checked, and the standing-irons, which were attached to the dog-collars, restrung with sparkling fresh satin ribbons in rainbow hues. Then came the cooking. Someone at Fort Smith had presented me with a few pounds of fresh potatoes, a rare treat indeed, which I had been keeping in reserve. These I boiled and mashed. Placing equal quantities on nine-inch pie-plates I set them out to freeze. They would be a welcome change, I decided, from the monotonous diet of beans, which were the staple trail fare of every Northerner. Then, grinding some fresh meat, I made up a batch of hamburger patties, froze them and tossed them into a sack along with the potatoes. In the meantime, Angelique had been busy turning out large batches of the inevitable bannock, which was also frozen. When all was in readiness, John James packed the grub-box and lashed it onto the grub-sled along with one hundred and fifty pounds of frozen whitefish for the teams which, incidentally, were fed but once a day—when camp was made at night. Placing two for each dog at his feet, and standing some distance away, John would toss the huskies their ration, after which each of them would dig a hole for himself in the snow, wrap his bushy tail around his nose and curl up to sleep.

On the morning of departure, though still barely able to walk, and in complete defiance of the doctor's orders and my pleadings, I assisted Phil into his *carriole* and kissed him good-bye. John James tucked his eiderdown robe about him and off they went on their 1,500-mile journey, to the silvery tinkle of the dog-bells, John's shrill cries of *Marche! Marche!* and the swishing crack of the

long lash which curled over the pointed ears of the huskies, the foregoer loping ahead on light tripping snowshoes, breaking trail.

What a colourful, unforgettable picture the cavalcade made as the dogs sped swiftly along the glittering trail through the snow-piled pines and frosted willows but there were tears in my eyes when the primeval silence once more enveloped all and I entered the house to begin the first of what were to become many lonely vigils in the years ahead. Oddly enough, that old tear-jerker, *My Ain Folk*, came suddenly to mind and I went to pieces. How I longed for the sight of a familiar face—the sound of a familiar voice!

Six weeks later — weeks which had been a veritable nightmare of worry to me—they returned. As I have related, my husband was anything but strong when he left. The weather had been bitterly cold, and I scarcely dared to think of what might happen to him sleeping in a hole in the snow at 40°, 50° or 60° below zero night after night beside a campfire on the trail. However, when he stepped from the *carriole* I was astounded. Instead of the gaunt skeleton I had last seen he was, now, as fat as a seal while his face was a deep mahogany from the rays of the sun on the snow. He looked more like someone returned from darkest Africa!

“You son-of-a-gun!” I exclaimed, laughing and crying with excitement, “I’ll never worry over you again. I expected a ghost to return, now—look at you!”

“I’ve never travelled with a finer dog-driver than John James in all my life,” Phil told me when we entered the house. “He’s been kindness and devotion personified on the trail. As a matter of fact, never before have I seen the inherent nobility of the red man so vividly displayed!”

6.

Summer in the Lone Land

About the middle of May the river threw off the yoke of the Frost King, bursting its fetters with an awesome booming and crunching that cannonaded backwards and forwards from bank to bank and filled the air with a deafening roar. It was, truly, a frightening sight. There was something almost brutal about it. Enormous cakes of ice, as big as houses, would meet with the impact of gigantic sledge-hammers, grind wildly together like Trojans in mortal combat, then fly through the air to come down with a thunderous crash atop the pinnacles and spires which thrust up everywhere, glittering wickedly in the scintillating rays of the spring sun. Piling up against the high rock beside the rapids the ice formed a massive barrier which forced the tumbling waters to back up along the shore in a mighty flood and drove the Indians from their cabins. For three days this battle of the elements continued to the accompaniment of a blood-curdling orchestration which one had to hear to believe. It left one mentally exhausted when all became calm again but, nevertheless, it was an awe-inspiring spectacle which I never tired of watching.

No sooner had the river cleared than Christine Gordon and her brother pulled their lumbering scow into the bank near the Company's post. They had followed right

behind the ice all the way from Fort McMurray to sell their cargo: fresh eggs and oranges at fifty-cents apiece, and potatoes at a dollar a pound. Despite these exorbitant prices, however, their scow was cleaned out in jig-time. Even the red men jostled excitedly for their share of these rare treats.

Inevitably, things never happen singly in the North. Late the following afternoon a diminutive canoe appeared through the sloshing rain, bobbing like a cork on the bosom of the swollen river. Pulling into the bank, Captain Mills stepped ashore. Brother-in-law of Charles Camsell, the late Deputy Minister of Mines in Ottawa, he had been delegated to build a new warehouse for the Company, and had been paddling steadily through the storm from the Fort Vermilion Chutes, about seventy miles away, since five o'clock that morning. Though soaked to the skin and shivering with cold, his foghorn voice reverberated everywhere as he greeted old friends with Rabelaisian pleasantries.

"Well, skipper," my husband greeted the Captain warmly when he came up from the post, "did Jean give you enough to eat when you arrived?"

"A couple o' the daintiest, postagestamp-sized sandwiches you ever saw," he chuckled diabolically, "and a cup o' pink ecclesiastical 'awfternoon' tea."

"Good God!" Phil ejaculated. "You must be starving."

Not till then did I realize the Captain hadn't had a bite to eat since pulling out from the Chutes some eleven hours before he reached the post! It was then that I learned another lesson about life in the Lone Land and that was—no matter what the hour, day or night, Northern custom *demand*ed that one set a man-sized meal on the table, along with strong tea, the moment a stranger appeared.

Now we began to watch anxiously for the arrival of the sternwheeler with her cargo of long-looked-for mail,

magazines, newspapers and fresh supplies. We had used up all our rations with the exception of some tea, sugar, condensed milk and a pound of salt butter. Before break-up we had been forced to scour the forest trails near dusk each day with our .22's in search of rabbits. After Mary Larocque had skinned and cleaned them they were either fried or made into a stew, Mary falling heir to the heads and eyes, the latter an epicurean tidbit which all the Indians love. Occasionally we hiked over the river-ice to Hay Island in search of mallard ducks. This was strictly against all regulations but an empty stomach knows no laws. Furthermore, since Inspector Percival and the police had also been driven to the same extremity, we were quite safe since he was in no position to take action.

By this time the ghastly monotony of our existence had caused such strained relations between all the white residents, with the exception of ourselves and the police lads, that hardly one was on speaking terms with another and all bedlam broke loose. Intimate confidences exchanged so eagerly, especially between the ladies, in the fall or silent winter months, were suddenly betrayed and the air made hideous with revilings and bitter recriminations. Each individual was, in their own estimation, like Caesar's wife—above reproach. *The other fellow's morals smelled like hell!*

Daily, we hiked to the shore to search the wide expanse of the river with eager, hungry eyes until, at last, a small puff of smoke appeared above the pines some distance around the forested bend.

"The Boat! THE BOAT!" shrilled a score of excited voices. Running to and fro to no apparent purpose the lonely exiles spilled up and down the shore chattering inanities and excitedly hugging each other until, with belching funnel and streaming pennants, the *Northland Echo* sidled into the wharf by the Northern Trading

Company's post to the accompaniment of jangling signal bells.

"What one earth are those?" I asked Phil as my eyes fell upon a stack of wooden cases piled high beneath the pilot house.

"The liquor permits! Just wait and see," he chuckled malevolently, "what happens when John Barleycorn gets into his stride!"

No sooner was the gangplank thrown ashore than everyone streamed excitedly aboard, anxious for the sight of a new face and the sound of a new voice. In jig-time, the Mounted Police were inundated as trapper after trapper, trader after trader, yelled for them to clear *his* permit first. As each came into their own they literally danced ashore, their faces beaming, and made for their cabins or posts. An hour later bitter foes, having spliced the mainbrace, were meandering around, arms linked in a warm *camaraderie*, greeting all and sundry with hearty pats on the back and exclaiming alcoholically: "You're . . . *hic!* . . . a helluva good feller, Sid. A helluva . . . *hic!* . . ."

"An' you're," Sid wiped a maudlin tear from his eyes, "*two* helluva good fellers, Jack!"

How I laughed! The winter, with its bitter hatreds, misunderstandings and recriminations was over. The boat was here at last!

Twenty-four hours later the Company's new *Athabasca River* swung into port and our old friend, Captain Norman Freakley, stepped ashore in company with John Sutherland to inform us that he had been sent down to reorganize the transport.

Whilst Phil was busy at the post, Norman invited me aboard to have a look around. Our inspection over, we prepared to disembark only to find the gangplank had been thrown ashore for repairs and the diminutive skipper, Captain Haight, resplendent in glittering braid and brass

buttons, blustering about, blaspheming and, just generally, exercising his renowned and lurid vocabulary with complete disregard to his position or whoever happened to be present. Added to this dubious oratorical accomplishment, he was also the possessor of a weird and, often, dangerously perverted, sense of humour.

"What are we supposed to do?" I asked him. "Fly, walk or swim ashore?"

"Hey! you—Williscroft!" he bawled out to the Mate. "Bring that — two-inch plank over and swing it aboard."

"But," I expostulated, taking in the distance between the ship and the shore, "that plank won't be strong enough to hold me, let alone Captain Freakley!"

"It'll sure as hell hold *you*," he replied. "All you've got to do is edge down sideways . . . there's nothing to it!"

Seething inside, but not wishing to make a fuss, I stepped gingerly onto the plank. I had taken but a few steps when it suddenly sagged and parted in the middle. Next second I was struggling beneath the water, caught firmly in the grip of the swirling current near the head of the Rapids, then I blacked out. When I came to, I learned that Captain Williscroft, noting the accident, had dashed for the river, caught a glimpse of my orange-coloured tam beneath the murky flood and dived in.

"But for the colour of your tam," he told me shakily, "I'd never have found you. You're lucky you weren't swept over the rapids!"

The dressing-down Haight got from my husband, Captain Freakley and others caused him to finally dash for his cabin and lock himself in. Needless to say, there was a new skipper in charge when the vessel made her next trip!

However, like many other grim occasions, this one, too, had its funny aspect. Shortly before the *Athabasca River* arrived, Jack McLellan had given me a bottle of beer

wrapped up in brown paper. "Take this home for a nightcap," he had told me and—*it was still tightly clenched beneath my arm when I was hauled out of the water!*

Later, I heard an amusing story about Captain Haight which I think is worth recording since it set the entire North laughing. Whilst in charge of a tug he had occasion to call to one of his deck-hands, Paddy Poitras, to throw out the anchor. Afflicted with stuttering, Paddy turned to the Captain. "Bu . . . bu . . . bu . . . bu . . . !"

"Throw out the anchor, you blankety so-and-so!" the Captain roared.

"Bu . . . bu . . . bu . . ." protested Paddy.

"*Throw out that blankety-blank-blank anchor!*" screamed Haight, now beside himself with anger.

Desperately, with a mighty heave, poor Paddy grabbed the anchor and tossed it with a splash into the swift-flowing river.

"God *Almighty!*" Haight was almost bursting at the seams. "There's no rope on it!"

"Tha . . . tha . . . *that's* what I was tryin' to tell you!" Paddy stuttered over his shoulder as he fled before the Captain's wrath.

A couple of weeks later Constable Grinstead dropped in and shyly presented me with a silver spoon bearing the Royal North West Mounted Police crest—a little token of appreciation for my having embroidered half a dozen cushion covers for his Marjorie in distant London. Meeting in Dr. Barnardo's Home in England, where they had been brought up, their love had endured and now he was returning to slip a ring on her finger, and open up the small tobacconist's shop that had been their dream all through the years. We were sorry to see him go. Slenderly-built, soft-spoken but shy to the point of being almost tongue-tied, he was one of the nicest lads we ever met.

One morning, to my intense surprise, I found the dining-room table set for breakfast and Rosa bustling around the kitchen stove. "Hello, Mrs. Godsell!" she eyed me self-consciously, her strong, handsome French-Indian-Irish face a mask of misery so much at variance with her usual cheery mien.

"How nice to see you, Rosa!" I smiled, greeting her as though nothing had ever happened.

"I'm sorrow I leave you when the *Gitche Okemow* was sick." She bent and kissed me on the cheek then brushed tears from her eyes. "I guess I'm nothing but a damned Injun after all. Everybody was scared . . . so was I . . . But—I'll never leave you again!"

And she never did as long as we were in Fort Fitzgerald. From that day on she was the most devoted, loyal friend it has ever been my good fortune to find. An Indian girl reared in the heart of the wilderness, she had a brilliant mind and a heart of gold and, to this very day, my affection for her is as deep as ever. A few years later she married an Assyrian trader from Fort Chipewyan, then left the North for good to reside in Lebanon, where she still is. Until the recent upset in the Middle East I used still to hear from her but, since then, I have had no replies to my letters. Incidentally, I have been given to understand that one of her daughters ultimately married an Argentinian millionaire!

It was about this time that a number of social-climbing squaws gathered in John James' cabin to indulge in a "pink tea" put on by his wife, Angelique, in imitation of her white sisters. Over their leathery bannock, salt butter and battered-enamel teacups, the tartan-clad squaws were deeply engrossed in discussing the indiscretions of the beauteous Victoire, and the backslidings of the other tawny ladies who didn't happen to be present, when the window shot up and three malevolent, grinning

faces appeared above the sill. They were the swarthy sons of the ladies who had not received an invitation. A coppery arm shot out. A squirming black-and-white object sailed from a frying-pan and descended with a thud upon the table. It was a live and very conscientious skunk, who appeared to realize just exactly what was expected of him and rose to the occasion with pungent alacrity. All bedlam broke loose! Fascinated, though almost ill with the nauseous aroma, I watched screaming squaws spilling through the doors and windows in a vain effort to escape the terrible effluvia; then I collapsed with laughter. That evening the victims, from all reports, were assiduously engaged in digging holes and burying their dresses and other garments to the derisive jeers of the uninvited guests.

When the *Athabasca River* returned it brought Charlie Sinclair, the District Manager, and Gaston Fournier, one of the Company's officers, from Edmonton to accompany my husband on his annual trip around Great Slave Lake and along the broad reaches of the Mackenzie. Charlie, a dark-complexioned, handsome man, stepped ashore with all the pomp and importance of his position. Member of an old Hudson's Bay family who had served the Company for almost two centuries, there mingled in his veins the blood of the old Earls of Orkney and the red men of the forests. Stockily-built, with deep-set eyes, square jaw and thin lips, he exuded, to my inward amusement, the very essence of the pomp and ritual of the Fur Lords of old. Time, it seemed, simply stood still for those numbers of the Old Brigade. In fact, it seemed, it didn't even dare to move for them. They hated changes of any sort, and were often impatient to the point of bitter anger if anyone even as much as suggested any alteration in the ancient regime.

Gaston Fournier, on the other hand, was the typical

mercurial Frenchman. A greater admirer of Napoleon, he attempted to emulate him by striking Napoleonic attitudes on the slightest provocation. Accustomed to the pageantry and the raising of flags which greeted such visits to the posts on Hudson Bay, he was somewhat bewildered by the casual treatment and lack of attention he received in the Athabasca-Mackenzie area where a man was as good as his master. Clad in a greasy khaki suit, with a small black, pie-plate hat set atop a shaggy mop of long unkempt hair which straggled over his collar he presented anything but the appearance that one would expect from his lofty opinion of himself.

That evening, as we sat down to dinner, he chuckled. "My family," he announced proudly, "zay all fight to see who sits beside me at ze table. But, my oldest son—*voila!* He is ze smart one. Rushes into ze dining-room an' spits in ze plate of soup next to me so zat he can 'ave zat seat!"

Charlie Sinclair exploded with laughter.

Continuing in this vein, Fournier then told proudly of how he and his wife came home one night to find his eldest daughter draped in the window curtains, and the boys throwing furniture over the upstairs railing to see how high it would jump in the hall below. "Now," he laughed, "all I 'ave in ze front room is a table, four broken chairs, a map of Canada on ze wall, an' a broken gramophone!"

As though to emphasize the remark about his son and the soup he finally took a gulp of coffee, made a wry face and spat it back into the cup. "Zat, Madame, is *not* ze way zay make coffee in France!" he snorted.

I was transfixed with horror at his behaviour but the effect of his remark upon Alice Bourke, my temporary maid, who appeared in the dining-room at that moment, was magical. Her dusky features distorted with anger, a

torrent of guttural Crec cascaded from her lips, the kitchen door slammed and she was gone—never to return!

However, despite his idiosyncracies and hectic home life, Mr. Fournier had been a first-class Eskimo trader before joining the Hudson's Bay Company, and I recalled with inward mirth the story told me by Captain Freakley of the *Stork* which plied the northern seas each summer. Some years before, at his post in the Arctic, Mr. Fournier had seen a Hudson's Bay woman with a baby carriage—a novelty of colossal interest to the local Eskimo ladies. Determined to put a fast one over on the Company, he ordered a shipment to be sent out from London the following season. It, however, arrived too late for the opposition ship and the Company had agreed to pick it up. As Captain Freakley strolled along the West India Dock one afternoon he was accosted by a somewhat bewildered Cockney mate. "Sye, Cap'n," he exclaimed, staring, goggle-eyed, at the large pile of crates, "who's this 'ere bawstard Fournier? There's *forty* bleedin' pee-rambulators 'ere—all addressed to 'G. Fournier, Fort Apuk'! *Is 'e a bleedin' Mormon?*"

Overnight waxen buds burst forth, clothing trees and willows in a mantle of shimmering greenery; crocuses raised their lavender heads above the bright green carpet of moss whilst everywhere could be heard the silvery trickle of running water. From the sloughs arose the flackering of wildfowl and the sonorous love-song of the frogs. In the surrounding forest the musical treble of myriads of feathered songsters mingled with the creaking of wagon wheels, the whinnying of horses, and the sharp cries of bronzed skimmers as they rushed load after load of freight across the portage. Truly, the hounds of spring had severed winter's traces.

Each sternwheeler from the south disgorged its load of

Mounted Police, Government officials, traders, missionaries and tourists. Among them were Gladys Patterson from Sheffield, England, who was *en route* to Fort Norman to become the bride of Frederick Jackson, the Company's clerk, and also John H. Moran, Inspector for the Northwest Territories and Yukon Branch of the Department of the Interior, a dapper, handsome Frenchman who was destined to become one of our staunchest, most devoted lifelong friends and an outstanding authority on the Arctic and the North. Soon the settlement, to say nothing of our house, was filled to overflowing. Amongst our summer guests were Major Mackintosh Bell of Almonte, Ontario, co-discoverer with Charlie Camsell of the site of the radium-bearing ore on the shores of Great Bear Lake; his assistant, Clarence B. Dawson, Dr. J. J. O'Neill of McGill University, a former member of Vilhjalmur Stefansson's Canadian Arctic Expedition, M. Y. Williams, now head of Geology and History at the University of British Columbia, and Judge Lucien Dubuc of Edmonton—charming people whose presence was ever a delight.

One morning the Major highly amused me. In company with Clarence, he had gone up to the barracks to pay his respects to Mrs. Percival. In jig-time they returned. "Brr! *What* a reception!" he ejaculated, pretending to be shivering with cold. "The *Chatelaine* simply froze us. Made it very obvious that we were *mal venu*. Dear oh! dear," his eyes were pools of mock concern, "what social error *have* we committed?"

"Accepted the hospitality of 'people in trade'," I laughed. "You are now *persona non grata*!"

Mickey Ryan and his brother, Pat, were now stationed at the Halfway, between Fort Fitzgerald and Fort Smith, busily engaged in handling the Company's freight, which had to be transported across the sixteen-mile portage circumventing the rapids. Their sister, Blanche, had

arrived from New York in company with her friend, Betty Smith of Fort McMurray. Soon I found myself the centre of as merry a group as I could wish to meet. Joined by Major Burwash and other kindred souls, we went on hikes and picnics, indulged in target practice out in the woods, danced and just generally had a grand time. No longer was I lonely. My only trouble now was to find sufficient time into which to cram all the activities that kept cropping up. As a matter of fact, as the wife of the Company's head official in the country, I was expected to entertain each new lot of arrivals and, many a time, Rosa and I spent half the night baking and cooking in preparation for each new "invasion."

Meanwhile, the wretched Kelly had been replaced and had left for Fort Rae to join the Northern Trading Company. Not until a year later did I run into him again. But not the porcine, over-fed Kelly who had turned up his nose at my cooking. Having subsisted at Fort Rae on dried meat and rabbits he had been reduced to a mere caricature of his former self. Cast aside by the Northern Trading Company, he was a completely dispirited and dejected wreck. Perhaps it was mean but, having suffered as I had at his hands, I could not resist remarking: "I have no doubt, Mr. Kelly, the thought of my cooking must have appealed greatly to you whilst you were *starving* at Fort Rae!"

One afternoon, to my intense joy, Mrs. Sutherland stepped ashore, her rosy face wreathed in smiles. She had made the trip from Fort McMurray to find out how I was getting along. With her was Mary O'Neill, who was again working as stewardess on the *Athabasca River* for the summer season. As the house filled with visitors, Mary insisted upon taking over along with Rosa and disappeared towards the kitchen. When she finally returned she was listing heavily to port, her hat slanted crazily over one eye.

"Mrs. Godsell . . . your *Wedgwood!*" Mrs. Sutherland gasped.

Simultaneously, Johnnie Moran and Clarence Dawson dashed across the room to rescue the tea-tray which Mary was holding at a dangerous angle.

"Tha-sh a'right," Mary's Irish eyes were snapping fire. "Get the hell 'way. I've handled shings in shstorms a'fore!" Setting the tray upon the tea table, she wobbled her way outside, heading for the boat to sleep off the effects of her little celebration before waiting on the passengers at dinner.

One morning, shortly after my husband, Fournier and Sinclair had left for Fort Smith, I searched in vain for a pillowslip which was missing from Fournier's bed. Not until they returned a week later did I discover what had happened to it. Having no dunnage-bag, Mr. Fournier had simply taken it off the pillow, stuffed it with socks, shirts, underwear and official reports then, on his trip across the portage, used it as a footstool! It took me a week to cool off, and several more for Rosa to get the stains off it. In the meantime, he and Phil had again departed for Fort Smith on the first lap of their trip around Great Slave Lake aboard the little schooner *Fort Rae*. Mr. Sinclair, however, was forced to remain behind, thanks to a bad attack of arthritis so once more I was forced to assume the role of a nurse. Finally, by the third week in June, he had recovered sufficiently to get around again and I was able to make preparations for a trip to the Arctic, the S.S. *Mackenzie River* being due to pull out from Fort Smith early in July on her first trip of the season to the down-river posts with her cargo of mail and supplies for the Missions, Police barracks and trading posts perched atop the bank, some two hundred miles apart along the 1,300-mile reaches of the mighty Mackenzie.

By now night had ceased to exist and I found myself

enjoying the novelty of twenty-four hours of continuous daylight and sunshine. Life was, as a result, turned topsy-turvy and most of our activities took place when, ordinarily, we should have been asleep. During the day we suffered through broiling heat, made all the more maddening by the thick swarms of mosquitoes, the granddaddies of them all, which penetrated even the finest mosquito-nets draped over our beds for protection; the swirling clouds of murderous bulldog flies which alighted with lightninglike rapidity and snatched chunks out of our hides, and the millions of infinitesimal black sandflies which stung like nettles. So thick and pestiferous were these insects that Mickey Ryan and his crews were forced to keep their teams in darkened stables, covered with protective nets, during the day. Then, after six o'clock, they were hitched-up and the work of hauling the mountains of freight across the portage commenced.

All night long the wagons creaked and groaned past our house to the raucous shouts and sometimes lurid language of the skimmers. Their vocabularies were truly something to marvel at and Red Martin, the chap who had concocted the "milk" from flour and water at the end-of-steel, could top them all. Also, he had a temper which matched his hair. On one occasion, when something went wrong, he sent Mickey a note giving him "an honest-to-God cussin'," as he put it. A short time later there came the pounding of hoofs, then a horse and rider emerged from amongst the poplars. It was Mickey! Dismounting, he approached the skimmer and surveyed him with a hard, cold smile. Red's belligerency evaporated immediately.

"I jest received that note o' yours," drawled Mickey softly, "and came over to see you about it."

"Well . . . er . . . Mickey!" Red stammered,

"Did'ju write that note?"

"Well, ya know . . . it was just like this, Mickey . . . !"

"All right," Mickey held out the offending slip of paper. "You'll either eat them words right here and now or take a lickin'!"

"But . . . Mickey!" Red protested.

"I'm not foolin'," Mickey's eyes were steely. "You either eat them words or . . . !"

Red's face assumed a mottled hue. Gradually the piece of paper disappeared into his capacious mouth and he commenced to munch away. Mickey waited till his Adam's apple rose and fell a couple of times, grinned at the knot of men grouped nearby, then mounted and disappeared along the trail. Red's threatened strike was over!

On the afternoon of July 6 I drove across the portage to Fort Smith in company with Clarence Dawson and Mickey. At last, the ice had cleared from Great Slave Lake and the sternwheeler was ready to depart. Slipping and sliding down the steep sandy bank through blinding clouds of insects we found the waterfront a beehive of activity and excitement, the residents milling about saying reluctant farewells to friends they wouldn't see for another two years, and the funnel of the *Mackenzie River* belching forth clouds of smoke. Last-minute freight was being stowed aboard two large scows, which were to be towed alongside. Above the din the Mate bawled out orders to the inevitable howling of the huskies who roamed the shore.

"Oh! Lord, Jean!" Captain Freakley groaned and pointed to the deckhands, swarthy-faced Indians and 'breeds in blue overalls, brass-studded leather cuffs, their necks swathed with brilliant cerise and green silk handkerchiefs, and their raven locks adorned with huge Stetsons. "Did you ever see anything so absurd? A floating peanut-stand manned by cowboy sailors!" It was

too much for his deep-sea sense of humour. "Shades of the good old British Navy!" He doubled up with laughter.

Not till seven-thirty in the evening did our heavy-laden craft pull out into the current of the Slave to the ringing of signal bells, the thrashing of the red-painted paddle-wheel at the stern, and the cries of farewell from those lining the bank. From the lower deck, jam-packed with bales, cases, mail-sacks, Indians, 'breeds and the inevitable dogs, the strains of a mouth-organ mingled with the shrill cries of squaws as they settled their black-eyed progeny amongst the freight.

I was *en route* to the Arctic at last!

7.

Land of the Midnight Sun

That night we made nearly ten miles, four of which were due to the current. Then we tied up at the right bank to bail out the smaller of the two scows which had been dragged along for the last four miles almost completely submerged. A fresh breeze was blowing, and the stern-wheeler cavorting beside it splashed so hard that the smaller vessel was all but foundered and one of its gas-tanks floated away. The oil-barrels were brought from the prows to the sterns of the scows so that they could keep their noses above the waves in their next skirmish with rough water.

Around four in the morning the boat woke up, made steam and threshed her way two miles downstream, tying up in the mud around six o'clock beside a monstrous pile of freshly-cut wood. It was an hour before the chute was rigged to slide the wood aboard and the first log thudded down to the pit-brink in the crowded engine-room. These woodpiles were, truly, something to see. Built by the Company's woodcutters, the logs were sawed in four-foot lengths and piled in a double row about fifty feet long, with logs driven in as uprights at each end to keep the pile from falling down, and cross-sticks neatly on top at the corners to keep them square. Ed Martin, who had

erected this particular monument to his craft, had marked every other log "H.B.C." and put up a sign "H.B.C. wood."

As far as the eye could reach, the black earth bore the scars of the break-up's mad rush, huge holes having been gouged everywhere by the cannonading ice. On the ragged fringe of the bank bearded pines leaned crazily in all directions, about to fall crashing over the edge.

Halfway through the loading-up process the sun disappeared and a drenching rain swooshed down, accompanied by a howling wind which swept everything in its path like something possessed. Soaked to the skin, Roddy Potter, the purser, and Dave McPherson, the pilot, carried on without a qualm, it seemed, measuring the diminishing woodpile till the deckhand at the chute's edge yelled "*Tout fini!*"

We had to tie up to the bank till the wind went down. Captain Lou Morton couldn't afford to take chances for, in those days, if the consignment of supplies went to the bottom it would take a year to replace them. This would mean starvation at all the posts and settlements down-river. And Lou prided himself upon his reputation for carefulness and precaution in the way he handled his ship. Though affable and little given to polite chit-chat with the passengers, he controlled his crew with a firm hand, at all times knowing exactly what he was doing.

Around ten o'clock the following morning the wind abated and we continued on our way. Debouching from the mouth of the river — a network of narrow channels snaking their way through bleak, low-lying muskeg covered with a disconsolate growth of willows—we followed a devious channel out onto the wide blue reaches of that immense inland sea — Great Slave Lake¹ — the golden

¹Discovered by Samuel Hearne in 1771, this vast body of water measures 11,200 square miles, approximately. It is one of the largest inland lakes in the world.

sunlight glinting in iridescent patches on the gentle swell of the waves. Swinging around Moose Island we saw, outstretched on a long sandy beach two miles away, the whitewashed log buildings of the trading posts, the red-roofed barracks of the Mounted Police and the wooden steeple of the Roman Catholic Mission church. Like a gossamer cloud, a pall of smoke from the conical tepees of the Yellow-Knife and Dog-Rib Indians, in to meet the Indian Agent and obtain King George's Treaty money, hung like a curtain over the bay. Even at this distance we could hear the wolfish howling of the huskies, the guttural scolding of some angry squaw and the inevitable *boom! boom!* of a rawhide tom-tom.

No sooner had we dropped anchor a hundred yards from the shore than a host of buoyant birchbark canoes skimmed towards the boat and deposited upon the deck Pierre Mercredi, the Company's native factor, and a body-guard of dusky braves. We learned from Pierre that the violent storm which had held us up had also swept the lake. "Dose waves," he lisped in the peculiar sibilant accent of the forests, "dey come in so high de people dey no can go an' draw in dere nets, an' de fish all rotted. My goodness," he mopped his brow, "I'm glad dat you're herel"

During the storm a schooner offshore had been half-buried by the waves that had leapt twelve feet high as they raced and raged towards the shore, whilst Carl Murdoch's \$2,500 yacht lay high and dry on the rocks.

In company with Dr. MacDonald, Johnnie Moran and Constable McIvor of the Mounted Police, Indian Agent Card went ashore in one of the canoes to pay treaty. Seated at a small table, with the Union Jack fluttering from a pole stuck in the ground, he solemnly checked the names on his list and handed five crisp one-dollar bills to every man, woman and child in the band. The price they

received annually for the sacrifice of their land to the acquisitive whites!

No sooner was the money in the hands of the red men than it began to burn holes. With almost indecent haste they made for the trading stores where they gleefully exchanged it for the tawdry baubles so alluringly displayed upon the shelves for the occasion.

In the meantime, a fleet of flat-bottomed scows manned by dusky braves in nautical caps adorned with large "H.B.C." badges, moccasins, overalls and leather cuffs, arrived to lighten the mail and much-needed supplies ashore. Pierre, very much the *Okemow* for the edification of the passengers, was here, there and everywhere, fawning over Mr. Sinclair, checking invoices and snapping out orders in Indian to his underlings.

When the Treaty party returned they were accompanied by Jack Hornby, Hermit of the Barrens. As I have already mentioned, I disliked him when we met at the Card home the previous fall but nevertheless he intrigued me. Brought up in luxurious surroundings in England, he had attended Oxford University, trained for the British Diplomatic Service, then forsaken all to answer the call of the wild, heading into the wilderness to live a life of utter loneliness and isolation in the Barren Lands — a region no living man knew better. A recluse and a hermit, a man who loved to be alone, a silent wanderer in the frozen, blizzard-swept Barrens that extended northward from where the tree-line ended to the bleak shores of the Polar Sea, he would disappear in the fall from Fort Resolution, Fort Norman or some other lonely post on the Mackenzie with the slenderest of equipment — a rifle, ammunition, a pack-dog or a canoe, and be swallowed up in the barren tundra to the eastward. A year, perhaps eighteen months would elapse then he would emerge at some other post hundreds of miles away, gaunt, unkempt

and hungry. Camping in one of the Indian cabins, consorting with the Indians most of the time, he would trade his furs and disappear again.

"One of dose days," Pierre Mercredi told me, "Jack Hornby will *stay* in the Barrens, an' the wolves'll pick his bones. Why," the usually placid Pierre displayed unwonted warmth, "if it hadn't been for some of the Fort Reliance Indians he wouldn't be alive today. *Mon Dieu!* He spent one winter in a stinking wolf den 'way out in the Barrens, where no Injuns cver go. Just happen' some Yellow-Knives were up dat way in de spring, thought dey saw a wolf, an' went ashore to shoot it for de bounty," Pierre laughed grimly. "De 'wolf' was *Hornby*. He was so weak he could hardly crawl. Them Injuns stayed dere a couple o' weeks, hunted caribou for him an' fed him soup till he was strong enough to get around." He shook his head. "The Barrens'll get Hornby one of dese days for sure!"

At Hay River, eighty miles below Fort Resolution, Mrs. Vale stepped aboard, shepherding a number of Eskimo and Indian children whom, I learned, were being returned to their homes down the Mackenzie and along the Arctic coast. With a faculty of five, the Vales conducted the affairs of the Hay River Anglican Mission, which included the conversion of the natives into some semblance of the white man.

This phase of Northern life always seemed tragic to me. Separated from their families for from five to ten years at a time, these children were *untaught* everything Eskimo and Indian. At the very time that they should have been learning how best to wrest a living from the primordial forest and along the grim reaches of the Arctic shore, they were instead learning a smattering of English, the three R's, and to pray and sing hymns—an undertaking which

resulted in their developing a healthy contempt for everything they had been born to—including their parents!

Not only that—this “new way of life” bred superiority complexes amongst the Indians which caused the male element to aspire to be “big shots,” interpreters at the trading posts or barracks where they could sport nautical caps, fancy moccasins and navy blue suits every day of their lives instead of the buckskin of the forests—and the girls to snatch up a white husband, no matter how degraded a type he might be, or indulge in all the joys of connubial bliss without benefit of clergy. Lord Byron was just a little out when he wrote:

What men call gallantry, and gods adultery,
Is much more common where the climate's sultry.

He didn't know our North!

Some thirty-five miles up-river from the post are the Alexandra Falls, the upper fall being eighty-five feet high and the lower, a mile distant, fifty-five. An awe-inspiring sight, this mighty, glittering cascade outrivals the famous Niagara in beauty. What a pity they are so far from the beaten path! However, one day, I predict, these Falls will be a tourist lodestone.

At Fort Providence, a typical old-time fur fort with its huddle of log buildings behind a palisade, and the red ensign of the Company floating its salutation from atop the white-painted flagpole, we stopped just long enough to unload and meet the lonely exiles, headed by Mr. Balsillie, the Company's factor, who lined the shore. An Englishman married to a native woman, he had instilled in his hybrid progeny so many *manners* that on one occasion, when my husband was inspecting the post he noticed one of the boys watching him closely. When eventually he rose to visit the “Library,” as some Northerners called their outdoor toilets papered with *The*

Illustrated London News, *The Sphere* and *The Graphic*, young Balsillie sped ahead of him to open the door and stand stiffly at attention like a major domo until the *Gitché Okemow* entered.

"When I emerged," Phil chuckled, "he was still there. Cap in hand, he saluted smartly then closed the door behind me!"

Fort Simpson, our next port of call, situated on a steep-banked island at the junction of the Liard and Mackenzie, was alive with shouting humanity and howling huskies, all milling around in a fever of excitement. In no time the freight commenced to go off, led by a parade of broadly-smiling residents, each with a liquor permit adorning his shoulders.

To the westward of this lonely fort which for many years had been the capital of the entire Mackenzie River District, there stretched an almost untrodden wilderness of majestic, snow-crowned peaks and abysmal canyons through which roared brutish rivers; an area given over to the ferocious grizzly, the antlered moose, the mountain-goat and big-horn sheep. Somewhere in the heart of this inaccessible area, wherein prehistoric monsters were once said to roam, was the fabled Tropical Valley.

From Phil and other old-timers I had heard many sinister stories about this region: of how Willie and Frank McLeod, sons of the veteran Murdoch McLeod, who traded at Fort Liard for the Hudson's Bay Company, had gone in in search of gold only to have their brother, Charlie, find their skeletons a couple of years later beside a long-dead campfire and name the area "Dead Man's Valley," and of how Martin Jorgensen, Ollie Holmberg and many others, lured by the spell of the golden lorelei, had followed in their wake, only to leave their headless skeletons as mute testimony to the jealousy with which the gods of the Nahannie protected their secret.

However, as the news-hungry exiles avidly scanned the six-months-old letters and newspapers, and John Barleycorn dissolved the enmities of the lonely winter months in happy carousel, it was all too obvious that no one had a thought for this sinister region and all it stood for.

It was here that I met Flynn Harris, Magistrate and Indian Agent, a unique character if ever there was one. Of medium height, powerfully built, he was attired in a home-made khaki suit of semi-military cut which fitted where it touched, a pair of beaded moccasins, and a battered nautical cap which sat awkwardly upon his glistening bald pate. It was immediately obvious that Mr. Harris was a personage of more than usual importance, and that he expected to be treated with becoming deference.

"My dear *Mistress* Godscell! I am, indeed, honoured to meet you. Positively *dec-lighted*. Welcome to the North!"

Fascinated, I gazed at his unbelievable, almost Neanderthal, homeliness, his frightful squint and low, receding forehead. So squint-eyed was he that his nose almost touched that of the person whom he was addressing. A master of English, French, German, Spanish, Esperanto, Cree, Chipewyan and one or two other languages, he could quote the classics verbatim, had gone to school with Sir Robert Borden, a former Prime Minister of the Dominion, and would—but for his addiction to John Barleycorn—have been one of the leading criminal lawyers of his day. Now here he was—married to his second Chipewyan squaw, and the father of I don't know how many hybrid progeny.

Many were the stories told of him: of how he imbibed red ink, extracts, shoe polish, listerine—anything that was handiest, when his liquor permit was gone—and of how, when in his cups, he would conduct the business of the agency or the post office in his birthday suit, calling



Upper left: Mrs. Gerald Card—the author's "Northern Mother."

Upper right: Corporal Lorne Halliday.

Lower left: Corporal Jack Woods.

Lower right: Factor John Firth, H.B.C., Fort McPherson, N.W.T., with his diminutive Louchoux Squaw.



The author and her husband being made Blackfoot chiefs by Chief Calf Robe of the Blackfoot Tribe.

between splurges of work and copious draughts for Caroline, his wife, to slap him vigorously on the back and "*bust me gall!*"

Earlier that summer Flynn was seated by the river at Fort Fitzgerald with an opposition official from Edmonton who was bemoaning his bacchanalian indiscretions of the night before when he suddenly shot his face forward and exclaimed: "That was a swell trade we made last night, George."

"What do you mean trade?" George turned bleary eyes upon him. "You're crazy! We didn't do any *trading*."

"We sure did. Look!" Flynn flashed a wide grimace and pointed to his mouth. "Don't you remember *we traded false teeth?* Yours are the best fit I ever had. Just try and get them back!"

Mr. McDermott, the Postmanager, took me over to the house and introduced me to his warm-hearted Cockney wife who immediately ordered him down to the boat to pick up my laundry bag. "You'll want to rinse things out," she said. "I've a couple of tubs of hot water on the stove, all ready for you!"

I was astonished but, nevertheless, deeply grateful for her thoughtfulness. Hilariously witty, she kept me in gales of laughter whilst we toiled and moiled.

The laundry finished, Fred Camsell, formerly the Company's Postmanager here and the son of the veteran Chief Factor, Julian Camsell, who had been known to the Klondykers as "The Glass-eyed God of the Mackenzie" on account of the monocle he habitually wore, corralled me and escorted me around. Well educated, courteous and kindly to a degree he, too, did everything possible to make my visit pleasant, whilst his motherless, painfully shy little son, Charlie, the namesake of his famous uncle in Ottawa, clung to me like a leech. "Daddy!" he suddenly

exclaimed. "Why don't we keep the pretty lady here forever?"

Here, too, as at Fort Chipewyan, I found stacks of fascinating old *Daily Journals*, and I howled with laughter when my eyes lit upon the following entry in one of them:

January 1st, 1876.

Weather fine. Wind north. Mrs. Belcourt gave birth to a bouncing baby boy this morning."

Then, for the following *nine* days, the daily entry was:

Ditto. . . Ditto. . . Ditto!

Apart from these historic records there was also a splendid library of some seven or eight hundred volumes, some of which dated back to 1670, amongst them being Bohn's classics; sixteen volumes of *The Travellers Library*; Smithsonian Institute reports from 1858 to 1887; Grote's *History of Greece*; Plutarch's *Lives*; Barth's *Central Africa*; the works of Goethe, Chaucer and similar volumes of poetry, travel and philosophy, together with antiquated works of fiction.

An avid book-lover, I was deeply thrilled as I browsed around though not the least bit surprised. For, I had already learned that the average man of the North, despite his surroundings and sometimes rugged exterior, was a *thinking* man to whom trivialities were a bore, a man who tempered the harsh realities of his existence by communing with the classicists of old.

Since Fort Simpson was the halfway point between Fort Smith and Fort McPherson, we tied up here for some twenty-four hours in order that the crew could wash out the boilers, corroded with the mud of the Mackenzie.

That night there was a dance in the Company's house and we made merry until the early hours of the morning, to the complete annoyance of Bishop Lucas, who was *en route* down-river to inspect the Anglican missions. To

him, everything that savoured of frivolity was anathema. From the moment we stepped aboard at Fort Smith he had managed to rub everyone the wrong way and brought Captain Morton to the explosion point when he held up each and every meal with his lengthy Graces, and his dissertations on the evils of mankind. At each post we touched along the river he seemed to spend more time sniffing the aroma of the Oh!-be-joyful on the breaths of the revellers than he did on his ecclesiastical duties. Despite his long sojourn in the Northland, he overlooked the fact that these same revellers were often cut off for months at a time from their fellowmen—that they worked like slaves in the bitterest of weather garnering the furry harvest of the forests.

To a medley of farewells, and the inevitable blood-curdling howls of the huskies, we pulled out for Fort Norman, where Gladys Patterson was to be married. No sooner were we settled aboard than I suggested we start making confetti for the forthcoming event from the coloured paper-cups in our chocolate boxes, along with an extra lot for Miss Terry of Toronto, who was travelling to Fort McPherson to marry the Reverend Crisall of the Anglican Church.

Amid much badinage and laughter we snipped merrily away, the brides, Mrs. Jim Woolison—daughter of Angus Brabant, the Company's Fur Trade Commissioner—and myself and the brides-to-be being unmercifully teased by Norman Robinson, the assistant Purser, and the police boys who had by this time dubbed the *Mackenzie River* "The Bridal Boat"!

The heat on board was almost unbearable as we continued northward between the tall, white-capped ranges of the Rockies. By now our food supplies had reached the pork-and-beans, canned corned-beef and rancid bacon level, with rice substituted for potatoes. Often, too, we

had the nauseous, gooey stuff served at the same meal for dessert! Needless to say, my small appetite grew smaller, whilst I would have gladly exchanged all the rice in China for just *one* drink of clean, cold water. Since our drinking water had perforce to be hauled out of the turgid flood as we sailed along it was necessary to let the mud settle before we could drink it. And, with no means of sterilizing it, I often wondered how many germs we swallowed. But, the gods were kind to us—none of us ever got sick.

Each time we pulled ashore to wood-up, sleep was impossible, thanks to the din of thudding timber, the blinding swarms of pestiferous mosquitoes, and enormous masses of bulldog flies which, after dive-bombing for the attack, blackened the windows of the cabins, pilot house and saloon. They, veritably, made my blood run cold. Each morning, the crew *shovelled* them overboard in thousands!

8.

The Arctic Foreshore

Between Fort Simpson and Fort Wrigley the north Nahannie range of the Mackenzie Mountains hove in sight on the left bank, their treeless peaks and lofty cliffs a welcome change from the monotony of the forested lowland. In the eleven o'clock sunset we reached a bend of the river which pointed the sternwheeler towards the mountain wall that seemed to bar further progress in that direction. The sky was a riot of crimson, pink and lavender clouds floating against a saffron background. Their iridescent beauty, reflected with the sharp outlines of the trees in the smooth green waters below, left us speechless. Reality, for the moment, was lost and we gazed in awe-stricken silence as the artistry of Nature was unfolded in the vast canvas of the heavens.

Some hours later, as we neared Fort Wrigley, the Franklin Mountains reared their bulk on the right bank, the slopes and ridges covered with serried ranks of mighty spruce, many of which were destined to end their venerable age in a puny sternwheeler's fiery maw. Directly opposite the fort, Wrigley Rock rose a thousand feet into the blue, forming one arm of a mile-long wooded amphitheatre, with a similar bastion at the lower end.

That night, about a mile from the woodpile, we were forced to tie up and ride out the gale which struck with devastating fury. A rope was carried up the bank but there was nothing to tie to so the paddle-wheel was kept

turning at about eight or ten revolutions to the minute to hold us against the shore in lieu of cable or anchor.

Despite the storm, Jesse McCreary, caretaker of the nearby Northern Trader's woodpile, clambered aboard for a chat. Lean, wiry, with tremendous feet, he had on one occasion, when twenty-five miles from the post, run out of moccasins and wrapped his number twelves in mink skins at ten dollars apiece. They wore out, then he used marten skins at thirty-five dollars apiece. When someone told him the cost of his footgear he just grinned and replied: "I didn't know. I just caught the little fellers runnin' around the cabin!"

Arriving at Fort Wrigley we were welcomed by Tim Gaudet, the six-foot-six giant who reigned, lord of all he surveyed, with his native family in the Company's diminutive, bark-roofed dwelling house, the doors, walls and ceilings of which sported a riot of colour ranging from deep purple to crimson and blue and yellow.

Tim had done a roaring trade the previous season and Mr. Fournier, knowing that Tim hadn't seen his old home in far-off Quebec for over thirty years, and desiring to show the Company's appreciation, suggested that he take a trip with all expenses paid. That was fine! Tim was no end thrilled, and his face was wreathed in smiles as he bustled about. Finally, shortly before we were due to depart, he approached Mr. Fournier with downcast mein.

"*Monsieur* Fournier," he twisted his nautical cap nervously, "I'm thinking over what you say 'bout my trip an' . . . I 'ave changed my mind."

"Well," Fournier's voice was brusque, "it's up to you. If you don't want to take ze trip then we give you a present instead."

"That would be fine, *monsieur*," Tim beamed from ear to ear. "I'm one strong man," he flushed, "but, years ago, I rupture myself when working on the York boats. Maybe

now," he looked hopefully at Mr. Fournier, "the Company'll give me a truss instead?"

So simple was poor Tim that, the year before, he had sent into headquarters a private requisition for "thirty gramophone records—fifteen sacred and fifteen *profane*!"

Mrs. Gaudet, a bright-eyed, pretty Indian woman who spoke English haltingly, approached and proffered me a sample of Northern hospitality I could quite easily have forgone. Calling to her small daughter, whom I had observed sliding up and down the riverbank like an otter, her bare posterior seemingly glued to what I thought was a narrow black board, she took it away from her and handed it to me. "You take," she beamed. "Dried meat. It *minawsin*—good!"

Scrambling up the gangplank with heaving tummy, I slid out of sight of the post and prying eyes and consigned my anything but fragrant or appetizing "treat" to the fishes.

"Oh! Lord," exclaimed Norman Robinson as he collapsed into a deck-chair, his handsome Irish face streaming with tears of laughter, "popularity certainly has its penalties in this country!"

On our downward journey, just before reaching Fort Norman, we saw the coal deposits which still smoulder as they did when Alexander Mackenzie first saw them in 1789, the wind smiting our nostrils with a distinct sulphurous odour.

Fort Norman, at the confluence of the Bear River—which drains from Great Bear Lake into the Mackenzie—is perched on top of a high cutbank overlooking the wide reaches of the river and the distant blue range of the Mackenzie Mountains through which, in years to come, a pipeline was to carry Fort Norman oil to Whitehorse.

No sooner had I disembarked in company with the much-married and aged Charlie Christie of the Hudson's

Bay staff than the local Chief stepped up with outstretched hands and a diabolical grin on his face. As a torrent of guttural Nahannie spilled from his lips Charlie grew redder and redder in the face. The Chief was congratulating him on his latest marital conquest—*me!* Even the usually stolid Indians laughed uproariously when they learned of the Chief's mistake and that, instead of being one of Charlie's latest acquisitions, I was the *Gitche Okemow Esquayo*—the Big Master's Wife!

Climbing the ladderlike stairway leading up from the shore, I found McCreary, the woodcutter, hobbling around. When I remarked upon his lameness, which I hadn't noticed before, Innes Ewen, the Company's Post-manager, told me that, the previous December, at his lonely cabin he'd frozen his foot and amputated his toes with a jack-knife. For four months he lay there alone in agony. Some Indians, sent out to look for him, returned after a half-hearted search and reported he wasn't near the place where they had been told to look. Finally, Sergeant Sid Clay of the Mounted Police found him in his cabin mixing snow scraped from between the logs into a small sack of flour beside his bunk—his only sustenance for weeks! More dead than alive, he was brought back into the fort and attended to by Dr. Richardson, whose bill for six hundred dollars the Government would finally have to pay since the poor chap had no visible assets.

Within an hour, to the shrill command of a clanging bell, the passengers, crew and local residents tripped joyously to the Anglican Mission, the altar ablaze with masses of wild roses, where the Reverend Franklin Clarke united Gladys Patterson and Frederick Jackson in the holy bonds of matrimony. The ceremony over, we retired to the Hudson's Bay house to sample the wedding cake, brought all the way from England, and indulge in a

typical Northern hoedown, the revellers casting dull care to the wind until the boat finally pulled out.

There was one person at Fort Norman in whom I was particularly interested and that was D'Arcy Arden, who traded with the Eskimos and Indians at Dease Bay at the far end of Great Bear Lake, one of the loneliest spots in creation. Short, square-cut, with a somewhat stern cast of countenance, strong jaw and the clear gaze of a man who will not surrender, D'Arcy had found himself, a few years before, the centre of one of the Northland's epic tragedies.

In September, 1913, Fathers Rouvier and LeRoux had set out from this lonely spot to carry the Cross to the primitive Cogmollock Eskimos of Coronation Gulf. After an arduous journey on snowshoes they reached their destination and beheld, at last, the squalid snowhouses of their hoped-for converts nestling in the bluish-grey of an Arctic dawn. But they were doomed to disappointment for these primitive Stone Age men in skin swallowtails did not like these strange men in sombre garb, and refused to heed their words. Meanwhile, the *angatkuks*, medicine men, saw their hold on the people endangered if the priests made good their teachings, and did their best to poison the minds of their superstitious followers against the hairy-faced white *shamans*—priests.

One thing these missionaries had which was of almost priceless value in the Eskimo eyes was a modern Winchester rifle—a treasure to be secured at any cost.

Hardly had the tired fathers turned their backs upon the snowhouses on their homeward journey when, like thieves in the night, two Eskimos, Sinissiak and Uluksuk, stole silently in their wake. With creaking snowshoes, Father LeRoux broke trail through the deep snow for the dogs, which Father Rouvier was driving behind him. Slowly, they pushed ahead through the biting cold

towards the height of land, near Bloody Falls, when some sixth sense warned them that all was not well. A backward glance showed them two moving objects on the ice. The distance between the priests and the Eskimo pursuers lessened till the Cogmollocks drew abreast.

Leaping forward, Sinissiak attempted to snatch the rifle from Rouvier's sled. The priest resisted. A wild struggle ensued. Then, a copper snow-knife driven into his back, he collapsed lifeless upon the snow. Father LeRoux, some distance ahead, didn't realize, in the dim light, exactly what was taking place till bullets began to fall about him. Turning, he commenced to run. Too late, however, for the Huskie had got the range at last and soon a well-directed bullet laid him low. Then, following a custom peculiar to this tribe, the two Cogmollocks ate the livers of the murdered men so that they might acquire some of the knowledge and cunning of the whites.

Slowly the *moccasin telegraph* carried the story through fifteen hundred miles of sub-Arctic wilderness to Superintendent Worsley, Officer Commanding the Mounted Police at Edmonton. A month later in the summer of 1915, Inspector (later Assistant Commissioner) Denny LaNauze, an old friend of ours, and two constables took up the trail. At Fort Norman they met D'Arcy Arden, who had sent in the report of having seen an Eskimo at his trading post on Dease Bay attired in a bullet-riddled black soutane belonging to one of the priests.

Up the foaming waters of the Bear River the patrol fought its way, being forced by approaching winter to go into winter quarters at Dease Bay. Meanwhile, Corporal Bruce had set out from the Herschel Island detachment aboard Stefansson's schooner, *Alaska*, and was braving polar ice and blizzards in search of the missing priests.

Not till the end of March was LaNauze's patrol again

able to hit the trail. Almost blinded by the sun's glare, they made their way past Dismal Lakes and Bloody Falls, the scene of the murder, to Coronation Gulf where, spread out before them, was the frozen surface of the Polar Sea. In a squalid igloo on Victoria Land they arrested Sinisiak and, a few days later, thanks to Corporal Bruce's splendid work, Uluksuk was located near the mouth of the Coppermine and submitted tamely to arrest.

On July 13, 1916, the police party started on their return journey to civilization with their prisoners aboard the *Alaska*. Fifteen days later they reached the Royal North West Mounted Police barracks at Herschel Island. Owing to the lateness of the season they were forced to spend the winter at this desolate and isolated spot and, not until May 9, 1917, was the patrol able to set out on its twenty-five-hundred-mile journey up-river to the end-of-steel and civilization.

Owing to the bitter feeling that existed in Edmonton, the trial was held in Calgary. And here, while lawyers argued and the Prosecuting Attorney thundered his demand for the death sentence, the two Eskimos succumbed to overpowering drowsiness from the unaccustomed heat and slept peacefully and unconcerned throughout most of the trial. Unperturbed by the death sentence, which was later commuted to imprisonment, they were finally taken in charge by Corporal Bill Doak, an old friend of my husband's, and worked out their sentences as police interpreters at Herschel Island.

As I listened to D'Arcy Arden's story, I recalled the prophecy made by Bill Doak as he and my husband were camped beside the frozen Mackenzie near Fort Good Hope in the winter of 1920-1921. "Ever since Uluksuk and Sinissiak were taken on that joy-ride to Edmonton and Calgary, and shown the 'bright lights' and the picture shows, I've expected trouble. At the end of their time

they returned to the Cogmollocks with trunks loaded with white man's clothing, rifles and ammunition, and enough white man's culture to high-hat the rest of the tribe. Now, they're 'big shots,' and the other Huskies seem to think all they have to do if they want a good time at the white man's expense is to commit murder. Some day, Godsell, someone will pay the piper. *You mark my words!*"

When the sternwheeler pulled out from Fort Norman late that night no one got any sleep, not even the bride and groom, who were going as far as Fort McPherson on their honeymoon. Merriment reigned supreme and we danced until the stewardesses, the Misses Traynor from London, England, commenced to set the table for breakfast.

That was another bad night for the Bishop, who toddled out twice from his cabin in his nightshirt and bare feet and attempted to purloin the gramophone handle, only to be caught in the act by Captain Morton and be properly dressed down for his unwarranted interference with the ship's property.

About sixteen miles from Fort Good Hope the mighty flood of the Mackenzie was suddenly compressed between the battlemented rocky walls of The Ramparts, a narrow gorge where, the Indians say, "the river turns on its side to get through." Caught in the grip of the forceful current, our trembling, chugging craft was whirled swiftly along until, at last, we debouched upon the broad bosom of the river and saw in the distance the palisaded squares and muddled-log buildings of Fort Good Hope. From tall, tapering flagpoles red banners, bearing the letters of the various trading companies, fluttered out in welcome, and we were greeted by volleys of Indian musketry as we pulled into the bank.

Despite being within six miles of the Arctic Circle the

gardens here were fantastic. Owing to twenty-four hours of continuous daylight and sunshine, to say nothing of almost tropic heat, the handful of white residents were able to raise potatoes, cabbages and other vegetables of such giant proportions as to be almost unbelievable.

When, before leaving, I entered the Roman Catholic church to see its famous altar, which is known far and wide for its paintings, statuary and exquisite lace altar-cloths—all the work of devoted priests and nuns—the Father was conducting Mass so I stood quietly near the door and waited. A few Indians were seated upon the benches whilst an aged, shrivelled squaw squatted on the floor, her tartan shawl pulled high above her head. As I glanced at her I was amazed to see spirals of smoke curling up from beneath its folds. For a second I thought she was on fire then I realized the old girl was offering up her own peculiar brand of incense. Whilst following her devotions she was also enjoying the solace of her short, cutty pipe!

The freight unloaded, we were chugging north again, and continued to do so until we reached Arctic Red River, a small post surrounded by squalid log cabins and odoriferous fish-stages. It was here I contacted my first Eskimos, and also met Herb Hall, the Company's manager for the Western Arctic District, who had arrived the day before by Eskimo schooner to pick up mail and supplies. A veritable giant of a man, with a decidedly earthy sense of humour, he was part native and closely resembled his crew in his white dickey and sealskin *mukluks*.

Presenting me with an enormous polar bearskin, he invited me to look over the schooner. As I clambered aboard, my ears were greeted with the strains of *How Are You Gonna Keep 'Em Down on the Farm* which boomed deafeningly from the horn of an ancient gramophone.

No sooner had I stuck my head inside the cabin, which reeked of rancid fat, blubber, odoriferous humanity and urine-tanned caribou-skin clothing, than I turned and bolted for the shore—my stomach heaving.

"What's the matter?" Hall was laughing hilariously as he caught up with me.

"Ye gods!" I gulped. "*No farm ever smelled like that!*"

Whilst chatting on the Texas deck with Miss Terry, I noticed an aged Eskimo conversing with the various passengers then walking off down the beach with them, one by one. "That Huskie is up to something," I remarked.

No sooner were we seated in the saloon after the ship pulled out than a brash American tourist flipped a pair of *labrets*—ivory studs worn by the Eskimos on either side of their lower lips—upon the table. "I sure beat you guys to it," he gloated. "*That's the only pair of labrets left in the Arctic. Boy! did I ever get a bargain. Only paid twenty bucks for 'em!*"

Next second *nine* other passengers silently tossed their own *labrets* upon the table! Captain Morton leaned over and whispered in my ear. "Old Pokiak just cleaned up a couple of hundred dollars in less than an hour," he chuckled. "Who said these Eskimos are dumb?"

Soon we were heading up the channel of the Peel River, so narrow and so overgrown with lush willows and green vegetation that it seemed more like going through the tropics than the Arctic, and I marvelled as Captain Morton skilfully swung our craft around one sinuous bend after another for, whilst looking ahead, I was unable to see how we could possibly avoid smashing into the all-enveloping wall of greenery. It was impossible to remain on deck. The willows thrashed so wickedly against the windows of the saloon that I was afraid some of them would be broken. Smothering clouds of voracious mosquitoes swarmed everywhere; the heat was

tropical, and the sun a scintillating, burnished ball of fire high in the blue.

At last we found ourselves under another frowning clay bank on top of which nestled a handful of grey-mudded cabins—the famed Fort MacPherson—at that time the end of river navigation. For nearly ten days, under the constant thudding of the red-painted paddle-wheel, we had continued to push northward from Fort Smith through thirteen hundred miles of wilderness almost entirely devoid of any evidence of human or animal life except at the diminutive trading posts.

The unutterable loneliness of these little outposts of civilization—clinging like birds' nests to the riverbank, a hundred and fifty to two hundred miles apart—strikes one forcibly. Cut off for nine months of the year the life is one of extreme solitude yet, at boat time, they manage to surround themselves with somewhat of a gala spirit. With the hunters in from the woods, the trappers and camp traders lounging about in quiet contentment bartering their fur hunts of glossy peltries or helping the factors bale up the accumulated wealth of the winter for shipment to distant London or New York, and the clearings around the palisades dotted with the conical lodges of the tawny tribesmen who from the surrounding forests amass the peltries with which the wheels of commerce are kept revolving in the wilderness, these places present a vastly different appearance from what they do in the depth of winter. Then the Indians, half-breeds and trappers are scattered far and wide; the frozen river is a mass of piled-up *bordeaux*; the whole world is buried in a deep, still blanket of shimmering whiteness; and the traders, jealous and distrustful of each other, barely speak when they pass on the trail.

Seeing all these things objectively, I was completely awed by the vast immensity of that part of Canada known

as the Northwest Territories, that lies almost untouched beyond the frontier, and which is still so little known to the average Canadian and city dweller. Over a million-and-a-quarter square miles in extent it is, actually, a third the size of Europe, yet it supported at that time, according to Government estimates, only 4,046 Indians; 4,627 Eskimos, and 1,007 whites—less than 10,000 people all told.

The shore was lined with the usual lonely, news-hungry exiles, amongst them being Inspector (later Commissioner) Stuart T. Wood of the Mounted Police and his blonde wife, Corporal "Ginger" Johnston, Constable Stevens and others. In those days it was necessary for the entire staffs of the Hudson's Bay Company and the Mounted Police, together with books, ledgers, prisoners, and even huskie dogs, to abandon Herschel Island and move over on the last ice in May to Fort McPherson or Arctic Red River to await the arrival of the sternwheeler with mail in mid-July, after which all would return by motor schooner in time to reach Herschel Island before the ships arrived from Seattle and Vancouver in August.

When, as Inspecting Officer, my husband transferred the Hudson's Bay Company's headquarters from Herschel Island to Aklavik the following year (1923), Aklavik became the commercial and administrative centre of the Western Arctic. This gipsying back and forth became a thing of the past. The dangerous Bering Sea route was abandoned in favour of the Mackenzie River transport route and, as such, it still remains.

Clambering up the steep pathway to the fort, I made the acquaintance of the uncrowned king of the Arctic—John Firth or "Old Man Firth," to give him the appellation by which he was known as a consequence of his forty years at this bleak and lonely spot. An Orkneyman, married to a little Louchoux Indian woman, he had

adopted many of the customs of the natives and, in his heart, had little love for the Eskimos for he still recalled the days when they had been less docile. The previous year he had made a trip Outside and when I suggested he must have enjoyed the change after forty years of isolation he shrugged and retorted: "Ah didna. After a week *civilization got too damned monotonous!*"

Although the Indians and Eskimos met and intermingled in apparent friendliness within the fort and along the beach it was obvious that each race merely tolerated the other, their natural enmity being so deep rooted in tradition. The massacre which Samuel Hearne had witnessed at Bloody Falls in 1771 was only one of many for it seems to have been a favourite sport of the Indians when they first obtained firearms from the Company to stalk these Eskimos much as they would caribou and musk-oxen, massacring them whenever the opportunity offered, and Mr. Firth assured me that, on more than one occasion, his diplomacy had been taxed to the limit to prevent bloodshed between the two races. However, from the day the Eskimos secured rifles they turned the tables on the Indians, displaying an alarming willingness to meet the red men halfway when it came to a matter of fighting, thereby dampening the latter's enthusiasm for picking quarrels with them with the result that they now accorded them far more deference than had been their wont a couple of generations before.

Meanwhile, the whale, which had given the impetus to the commercial exploitation of the Arctic, had yielded pride of place to the polar bear and the small and lowly white fox. These bright-eyed, fluffy creatures roam the barren tundra and frozen wastes in countless numbers at certain periods, becoming very plentiful within four-year cycles, and disappearing almost completely. Wherever

the polar bear travels in the winter one invariably finds numbers of white foxes following in his wake to feast upon his leavings. Usually he consumes only the lean part of the seal, leaving the remaining two-thirds to his parasitical followers.

This type of fox is a particularly curious little fellow, and is far more easily caught than the wary red fox and silver fox found in the forested country to the southward. In fact the white fox will frequently watch from an ice-hummock while the hunter sets his traps and, before he is out of sight, will poke around only to be caught in the cruel iron jaws and slowly freeze to death or to be later despatched with a blow on the head. At one time the Eskimos considered the white fox worthless and used it as a towel to wipe their greasy hands upon. At the time of my visit, however, they were getting as much as forty and fifty dollars apiece for these pelts. It had been a "good white fox year" along the coast and quite a number of Eskimos and their families had trapped as many as two and three hundred of these little animals and sold them to the traders for an average price of about thirty-five dollars apiece, enabling them to purchase motor schooners, washing machines, high-powered rifles, gramophones and even cameras.

Man's most dangerous and cunning adversary in this region is, of course, *Nanuk*, the polar bear. These formidable creatures are still quite numerous and a menace to the unwary. In the summer the polar bear squats on an ice-floe out at sea watching for an incautious seal and, in the winter, ranges the icefields in search of upthrusts which brings dead seals and other mammalian life to the surface to be devoured. The Eskimo method of destroying a polar bear is simple and effective. The huskie dogs are unleashed and, crazed with the bear odour, give chase—leaping over the rough sea-ice in a frenzy of excite-

ment. In a few minutes the alarmed and infuriated monster is "anchored"—surrounded by a horde of leaping, snarling, snapping huskies. Rising upon its hind legs, the bear will flail the air with its massive forepaws as the dogs leap in, biting and snapping at its flanks. During the confusion the Eskimo creeps forward and a couple of copper-pointed arrows, or lead bullets, will bring *Nanuk* crashing down upon the sea-ice. With the dead body still twitching, the knives of the women bite into the huge carcass, reducing it swiftly to a mass of red meat and gleaming bone.

Since the price being paid for a polar bearskin at this time was only ten dollars, and since cleaning the skins entailed so much work, including the removal of masses of heavy, yellow train-oil which impregnated and stained the fur, few of the Eskimo women bothered to dress the skins which were cast aside on the sea-ice.

In contrast with the gala spirit that had prevailed upon our arrival at the other posts we had visited there seemed to be a deep dejection overhanging the group on the beach. With listless steps and preoccupied mien they clambered up the gangplank. A moment later passengers and crew were thrown into a tumult of excitement. Like wildfire the story spread from lip to lip. Corporal Doak, my husband's old friend of many trails and campfires, was dead. Killed by a Cogmollock! A hushed and horrified silence pervaded the group as they pressed forward, hoping against hope, that they hadn't heard aright. Alas! it was only too true. Just three-and-a-half months before the genial, smiling Doak and Otto Binder, the Company's trader at Tree River, had fallen before the bullets of a young Cogmollock.

Exactly a year before, my husband had bid good-bye to Bill Doak as he left for Tree River, nine hundred miles

east of Herschel Island, to arrest Tatamagama and his eighteen-year-old nephew, Aligoomiak, for murder. One of the peculiar Oriental customs practised by the Cogmollock Eskimos of Coronation Gulf was that of destroying unwanted female children at birth. To such an extent had this practice been carried out that there was a decided shortage of women amongst these people, so much so, in fact, that the rising generation of young hunters, when they desired mates, were sometimes driven to follow the ancient custom of obtaining their women from other men by force. In this way many killings and blood feuds had originated amongst them, since the approved Cogmollock method of disposing of the superfluous husband was to despatch him with a quick shot or a stab in the back when he was off his guard and entirely unsuspecting. And, it was to arrest the perpetrators of such a killing that Doak had been sent upon this errand.

It was from "Ginger" Johnston, after things had quietened down, that I learned the details of the tragedy.

The previous April, while Clarke, the Hudson's Bay Inspector, and Constable Woolams were out at the seal-camp putting up dog-feed, Otto Binder had paid his usual nightly call at Doak's diminutive, one-roomed barracks. As they indulged in a game of poker Binder glanced at Aligoomiak, lying in his fur *shingabee* upon the floor. "What's the matter with him?" he inquired. "He's looking kind of surly."

"He'll get over it," grinned Doak. "I gave him a bawling out this morning for not chewing my *mukluks* soft, and for spilling slops upon the floor."

When Binder departed Doak threw himself upon his bunk, unaware that the young Eskimo was covertly watching him from his sleeping-bag. Towards morning, as he listened to the Mountie's steady breathing, Aligoo-

miak stole stealthily from the room, broke into the wooden leanto, snatched up a rifle and four cartridges then crept back. Taking aim, he shot the sleeping Doak through the thigh, then watched stolidly until he passed away four hours later. When, about nine o'clock, Otto Binder wended his way from the Company's post across the ice on his usual morning visit, Aligoomiak's bullet struck him in the heart and dropped him like a fallen caribou upon the snow.

Free at last, Aligoomiak headed out over the frozen reaches for the seal-camp, entered Kupak's igloo and boasted loudly of what he had done. Alarmed, Kupak set before him a dish of *ookchuk* then secretly despatched his son to warn the two remaining whites. Heading for the igloo, Constable Woolams succeeded in over-powering and arresting Aligoomiak, and had but recently arrived at Herschel Island with his prisoners and moved over with them to Fort McPherson.

That night there was quite a celebration in the Company's warehouse, from the rafters of which were suspended an array of fish-nets; traps, toboggans, dog-harness and other paraphernalia of the winter trail. The Crisalls had been married early in the afternoon, whilst it was *boat time* for the exiles, so—what better excuse for a bang-up dance and get-together? Overhead, the mid-night sun was sweeping in golden glory towards the horizon, not to disappear completely but to brush it and climb back again into the blue to compete, like a jealous diva, with the colossal saffron moon riding high 'neath the vast dome of the heavens.

The place was filled to over-flowing, the air vibrant with the happy laughter of the conglomerate assemblage. In no time dusky fiddlers in colourful *parkis* and *mukluks* were sending forth the strains of the *Red River Jig* and other Northern dances from squeaky fiddles. The fun was

fast and furious, swiftly reaching a crescendo when, without warning, the music stopped and the dancers seemed to freeze right where they were, some with one foot still in the air. It was positively eerie!

Quickly, I followed their frightened glances and spied a slight, black-haired Eskimo lad in a white *ahtegi* standing in the doorway. Eyes straight ahead, his face a graven mask, he pushed his way through the motley throng and seated himself upon a bench. In a split second the Indians were streaking outside, terror-stricken, yelling: "The murderer! *The murderer!*"

It was Aligoomiak! Since there was no way by which he could escape the police permitted him to wander freely about the fort. When, finally, he realized there was nothing to see except a rather surprised lot of *Kablunats*, as the Eskimos call the whites, who merely stood staring at him he casually arose and departed as silently as he had arrived. When, to their vast relief, the Indians learned he had gone they straggled back and the party was on again.¹

Immediately after breakfast the following morning I went ashore upon an unusual errand. One April afternoon in 1911, I was waiting on Portage Avenue in Winnipeg for a street car when a group of newsboys spilled everywhere yelling "*Extra! Extra!* Read all about the Lost Patrol!" A sudden impulse caused me to buy a paper. As I read the tragic story of the Lost Dawson Patrol my surroundings were suddenly blotted out and I found myself standing in a small churchyard in the Arctic gazing at four graves bearing the names: Fitzgerald, Carter, Kinney and Taylor.

Between them arose a tall grey-stone monument.

¹Sixteen months later, on February 1st, 1924, Aligoomiak and Tata-magama expiated their crime upon the gallows in the "Bone House" at Herschel Island.

"Some day," I heard an inner voice say, "you'll place roses upon those graves!"

I was icy cold when I returned to reality. What on earth, I wondered, had caused me to see this strange vision? What on earth would I ever be doing in that country? Afraid of being ridiculed, I dismissed the whole thing on the grounds of an overwrought imagination. Not until Phil and I became engaged, and I knew I was destined to spend part of my life in the Northland, did I utter a word about it. Now, here I was—in *the very fort from which the ill-fated party had set out!*

In 1904, the Dawson-McPherson patrol had been inaugurated by Harry Mapley of the Mounted Police to carry the Dawson mail then, from 1908 on, Corporal Dempster had made it a hobby, negotiating the five-hundred-mile course over the Yukon water-sheds in record time. Finally, thanks to a feeling of friendly rivalry, "The Wild Irishman," as Inspector Fitzgerald was known, started out from Fort McPherson on December 21, 1910, in company with Constables Carter, Kinney and Taylor with a view to beating Dempster's record—Carter having been hired as Special Constable and guide. In order to make time, rations and supplies were cut to the irreducible minimum, a fatal error in that land of intricate routes and treeless plateaus where the temperature often dropped to 60° and 70° below zero.

When, by the following February, no word was heard of the party, Corporal Dempster and Constable Fyfe set out from Dawson to investigate. On the morning of March 12 the sharp eyes of Charlie Stewart, their Scots-Louchoux guide, observed a faint impression in the snow which urged them on with the silent prayer that they were heading in the right direction. Next day they came upon more tracks which, for some strange reason, were following the winding course of the frozen Big Wind

River. Uneasy day followed uneasy day until finally, upon a dim trail beneath some pines, they came upon the frozen bodies of Constable Kinney and Taylor. Ten miles farther on they struck a faint trail leading towards a cutbank. Suddenly, Fyfe kicked up a broken snowshoe. Nearby, upon a pile of spruce boughs, they found the frozen bodies of Carter and Fitzgerald.

Too weak to carry on, forced by an overpowering Nature and a series of disasters to give up the unequal fight, Fitzgerald had covered his companion's face with a handkerchief when he passed away then scrawled with a charred stick on a scrap of paper his last will and testament: "All moneys in despatch bag and bank, clothes, etc., I leave to my dearly beloved mother, Mrs. John Fitzgerald, Halifax. God bless all. F. J. Fitzgerald, R.N.W.M.P."

Straightforward and honest to the last, Fitzgerald admitted frankly in his diary that the selection of an incompetent guide was the principal cause of the disaster. "Carter is completely lost and does not know one river from another," he had written on January 17. "My last hope is gone and the only thing I can do is return and kill some of the dogs to feed others and ourselves. . . We have now been a week looking for a river to take us over the divide, but there are dozens of rivers, and I am at a loss."

The last act in this tragic drama of the snows had been enacted in the little plot behind the small, white-painted Anglican Church at Fort McPherson. Not a dry eye was there in that drab, lonely outpost of civilization as the Reverend Whittaker intoned the burial service and the farewell salvos from the rifles of the scarlet-coated escort rolled across the barren tundra, not even amongst the slant-eyed Louchoux and their squaws who had gathered at the graveside in a last gesture of respect to the white *Shimaganishuk* who had crossed the Great Divide.

Heading for the Hudson's Bay post, I purchased four lengths of white satin ribbon, then wandered around the fort gathering wild roses. Fashioning them into four sprays, each tied with a ribbon bow, I wended my way to the graveyard. As I entered my vision came vividly back to me. Everything was *exactly* as I had seen it eleven years before! Placing my humble offerings upon their last resting-place I knelt and prayed then, moist-eyed, silently departed.

As I retraced my steps to the boat I felt, somehow, tragedy seemed indigenous to this lonely spot with its all-pervading atmosphere of loneliness and depression for here one felt the desolation of the Arctic bearing down like a weight upon one's soul.

To the usual medley of ringing signal bells, the thrashing of the paddlewheel, the howling of the huskies, and the brave cries of farewell twixt ship and shore, we pulled out into the current and headed south. My journey to the Arctic, with all its excitement and fun, was over. There was a lump in my throat as I watched the figures of the exiles on the lonely beach fade from sight and recalled the heart-warming welcome I had received here, as well as all along the river. For this was, truly, a lonely land wherein friendships meant so much, and it became more lonely still when the hour of parting arrived. Throughout my down-river trip I had been treated like Royalty as the *Gitche Okemow Esquayo*—the Big Master's Wife, the Postmanagers and their families, Indian chiefs and their tribesmen, all crowding around to shake me by the hand and present some little token of esteem whilst, at Fort Norman, a kindly old Chief had given me a beautifully-made model of a birchbark canoe. Truly, it was an experience to forever remember!

As we bucked our way back up-stream against the mighty flood of the Mackenzie we were constantly

conscious of the labouring of the engines and the eternal thrashing of the paddle-wheel, which caused our craft to creak and quiver from bow to stern as she took *three* days to accomplish the distance we had covered in a single day's easy journey downstream.

Upon reaching Fort Smith I found Major Burwash and the rest of the Government party waiting to welcome me home. "I'm going Outside soon." Mrs. Tedcastle rudely interrupted the Major's warm greeting.

"Lovely!" I replied. "Drop in and have tea with me when you come over to Fort Fitzgerald."

"When I get to Fort Fitzgerald," she literally bridled at the invitation, "I'll have no time for tea with you. I'll be staying at the barracks with the only *lady* in the North . . . my *dear* friend, Mrs. Percival!"

There was a stunned silence.

"How nice," I smiled sweetly. "I *do* hope you enjoy your visit!"

No sooner was I back in Fort Fitzgerald than Major Mackintosh Bell and Clarence Dawson arrived from an expedition to Thekulthili Lake in the heart of the Caribou Eater hunting grounds. As we sat at the dinner table that evening they congratulated me upon the beauty and originality of my lavender-and-white floral centrepiece which a group of Indian children had brought me as a home-coming gift.

"The flowers are lovely," I replied, "but, tell me, what *is* the name of them? For the life of me I can't remember."

"*Potato blossoms!*" Clarence replied, his eyes twinkling.

"Ye gods and little fishes!" I groaned. "The police are the only ones around here who raise potatoes. The little imps . . . they've raided their garden!"

"A little more 'oil' on the troubled waters, what?" the Major roared with laughter.

9.

"*I Was No Lady!*"

A few evenings later, as I was sitting on the veranda sewing and chatting with Rosa, I heard the *creak! creak!* of a wagon coming down the trail. Glancing up as it passed the house I saw Mrs. Tedcastle seated on top of a mound of freight and waved my hand in salutation only to see her face tauten in a frozen mask.

"*Wah! Wah!*" Rosa gasped, her face red with sudden anger. "*Dat woman!* She t'inks she's something—a Queen, maybe? All the time she's miserable an' make it trouble then wonders why the people doan like her. Even a bush Indian's got better manners. Why she treat *you* like dat?" Rosa was boiling.

"She's just bearing a fancied grievance over my popularity with the Major and the boys," I laughed. "She'll get over it one of these days."

Half an hour later the woods suddenly erupted with lamentations and shrill cries. Startled, I stepped to the rail of the veranda and glanced up the trail to espy Mrs. Tedcastle staggering along as though blind drunk. Wailing in the most heart-rending manner she made for the house.

"Mrs. Godsell . . . Oh! Mrs. Godsell . . ." She reeled up the steps and clung to me. "That awful woman . . . that *awful* woman Percival. I thought she was my friend," she mopped her eyes with a sopping handkerchief. "When I got to the barracks, and told her that I had come to

spend the night with them, she kept the screen door locked and demanded to know if I thought she was running a boarding house!" The words literally cascaded from her lips. "I don't know *what* to do," she sobbed bitterly again. "The boat won't be in till tomorrow afternoon and I've no place to sleep!"

"Never mind," I said. "I have plenty of room. Now, dry your tears and come along. Rosa is going to sleep at home tonight so we shall be company for each other."

When Rosa, her face an inscrutable mask, took her upstairs to one of the guest rooms I sped to the kitchen to get hot water so that she could clean up, at the same time calling to John James to bring her suitcases to the house. This done, I lit the coal-oil stove and prepared a meal for her.

That evening the poor woman was the very personification of embarrassment, and it took all the diplomacy and *finesse* I could muster to keep her a million miles away from any further mention of her humiliating experience. I kept her talking about her only child, an eighteen-year-old daughter named Comfort, whom she intended bringing back from school with her, and to whom she was deeply devoted. When she departed the following evening on the *Athabasca River* I presented her with a box of chocolates, and a little gift of welcome for Comfort. Alas! I never saw her again. When *en route* back from Edmonton six weeks later Comfort took suddenly ill at Fort McMurray and died of a heart attack! The broken-hearted woman left the North for good, to be followed a short while later by her equally prostrated husband.

When Phil returned from his summer inspection trip he remarked that Mr. Fournier wasn't feeling well and that the stodgy bannock, dried meat, salted caribou tongues and other trail fare had been just a little too

much for even his rugged constitution. "I'm giving him some calomel," he told me. In an hour you'd better give him a dose of Epsom salts." With that he departed for the post whilst Mr. Fournier went up to bed. Eventually, I climbed the stairs to ask if he was ready for his salts. I knocked on the door of his room then entered, expecting to see him laid out. Next moment I was so flaming angry I could have *knocked* him out. For, there he was, greasy trail clothes and all, tucked cosily between my linen sheets, his pie-plate hat atop his shaggy mop of hair, and my filmy lace spread crinkled beneath a heterogeneous conglomeration of note-books, scratch-pads and reports, and adorned with a large blob of ink from his leaky pen! The only concession he had made to the conventions was to take his boots off.

"Madame?" Busily he scribbled away without even glancing at me.

"Are you ready for your salts?" My voice was icy.

"*Oui, Madame. Tout suite!*"

My soul filled with rebellion and revenge, I went down to the kitchen and stirred and stirred Epsom salts into a glassful of water until I had used up almost the entire package then, placing a few lumps of sugar in a bowl, I returned and watched gleefully whilst he downed them.

When Phil returned he asked how Fournier was and I told him how I had found things in his bedroom.

"Buck up," he smiled. "He'll only be here two more days. Did you give him his salts?"

"I *did!*" I replied, then told him what I'd done. "I'll guarantee," I laughed in spite of myself, "he'll *never* get back into bed the rest of the time he's here!"

"Don't you think that was kind of tough?" He tried to look severe but his lips were twitching.

The following morning Rosa and I were in the kitchen preparing breakfast. Suddenly the door flew open and

Phil entered, doubled-up with laughter. When in the front hall a few minutes before, Fournier had appeared at the bend of the stairway, carefully balancing a "jerry" on which reposed, in lieu of a lid, his small black, pie-shaped hat.

"*Pardonnez-moi!*" exclaimed my victim as he backed up and disappeared out of sight, vainly striving to maintain his Napoleonic dignity.

As luck would have it, several Indians dropped in at that moment, one after another, to see my husband on business only to find Mr. Fournier, still holding the "jerry", either halfway up or down the stairs. Finally, with desperation born of despair, he ploughed manfully ahead, glared at Moise Mercredi then shouted in his inimitable French accent: "*Zis is no bouquet of roses . . . let me OUT!*"

No sooner had he departed for Fort McMurray a day or so later than Captain Freakley arrived from down-river, along with all the ship's crews, to await transportation to the Outside by the last scows of the season—Freakley staying with us at the house, and the men camping on the riverbank beside the Company's post. We were delighted to see Norman again, and I immediately proposed a dance to celebrate the occasion. My preparations were going apace when, around six o'clock, John James burst breathlessly into the house.

"*Tante Gitche Okemow?*" he demanded, his black eyes snapping.

"Getting ready for dinner," I replied. "Do you want him?"

"*Tarpoi! Truly!*" he answered grimly. "You no ask Corporal an' Mrs. Blank to de dance. Now—him *mad*. Him down at de store wid Constable Williams. Him arres' Mr. Leggo, an' seize de Company's furs!" The words rushed in a torrent from his trembling lips.

"What the hell's *that*?" ejaculated Phil, coming down the stairs two at a time.

Slamming his Stetson on his head he covered the distance to the post in no time, with me, bursting with womanly curiosity, at his heels. Throwing open the door, he confronted the red-coated figures of Corporal Blank and Constable Williams.

"They've seized these furs!" exploded Sid, jittering nervously. "Blank says that pile of muskrats on the floor were trapped out of season. That they're contraband!"

"Since when did *you* become an expert?" snapped Phil, whipping a couple of them right under Blank's nose. "Those skins," he was wild with anger, "are *prime* muskrats. They were trapped last spring, but Taranjo couldn't bring them in until now on account of smallpox. Don't you know a *prime* skin when you see one?"

Blank paled as he met my husband's angry eyes. "I'm still seizing them skins," he mumbled doggedly. "Just because you're *Hudson's Bay* don't think you're going to get away with that stuff!"

Suddenly, Phil's hand shot out. Grabbing Blank by the throat he pushed him back against the counter and started shaking him like a terrier would a rat, with Williams looking sickly on.

"Just go ahead and arrest *me*," he flamed. "I'm assaulting what's *supposed* to be an officer of the law," he shook him again, "and . . . *you've got your witness right with you!*"

"I don't want no trouble, Mr. Godsell," Blank's voice was quivering and he seemed on the point of collapse. "I don't want no trouble . . ." he reiterated, his eyes filling with sudden tears. "I know which side my bread's buttered on!"

"God *Almighty!*" Phil exploded. "I've seen lots of policemen in my time—*real* policemen, men like Clay and Doak,

but you, you son-of-a-bitch," his voice was filled with contempt and loathing, "you're a new type to me. *This* is purely personal on your part, *and you know it*. Now—pick up those furs and get to hell out of here as quick as you know how . . . before I really give you what's coming to you!"

Meekly, with trembling hands, Blank gathered up the skins and hurried out, with Williams in his wake, followed by derisive howls and gestures from the Indians who had gleefully watched the whole affair through the window.

Bright and early next morning Phil sent for John James. "Here," he handed him a letter, "take this to Inspector Percival and *hand it to him personally!*"

"That'll fix Blank," he smiled grimly at me. "I've told Percival that Blank's seizure strikes at the very foundation of the Company's freedom of trade. Henceforth, I'm insisting that, on every occasion that an Indian brings in furs for trade, we will notify the barracks in writing—and *insist* on Blank coming down to the post, checking the furs, rendering his decision as to which of them are prime or otherwise, and giving us a signed statement covering each lot we purchase. That'll keep him busy," his face was rigid. "And, before he's through, he'll be so fed up he'll pass some *unprime* skins. Then we'll have him where we want him!"

Later that day a somewhat disturbed Inspector Percival paid a formal visit to my husband. For an hour they were closeted in his office at the house then Phil escorted him with cold politeness to the door.

"Well, I won my point," he told me incisively. "From now on Blank's coming down each time a bunch of furs come in. Percival tried to argue as to what constituted a prime, or unprime, skin. He doesn't know the first damned thing about it, and I tied him up on technicalities a dozen times till he finally threw up his hands.

Just watch my step," he grinned broadly. "I know my furs, and I'll tie them both in knots before I'm through. Also, just watch Blank tripping up and down over those slippery, snow-covered rocks from the barracks a dozen times a day when it's fifty below!"

"Why a dozen times a day?" I asked.

"I'll just divide each Indian's furs into separate lots," he grinned diabolically, "and give Blank lots of exercise."

Knowing Phil as I did, and his remorseless determination when aroused, to say nothing of his shrewd subtlety as a fur trader, I realized that Blank was facing a hard time ahead.

Around ten o'clock the following night we were busily engaged writing letters, our last chance to get mail out until after freeze-up when, to our astonishment, Agathe Mercredi catapulted in, screaming wildly. For a second I thought she said "The stove's on fire!" and made a mad dash for the kitchen only to find everything all right. Returning to the front room, I became aware of excited yelling and shouting coming from the direction of the Company's post. Glancing quickly through the side windows I saw, to my horror, the whole place on fire, including the Company's large new warehouse wherein were stored all our year's supplies and trade goods! Fear lending wings to my feet, I reached the end of the trail to find Phil and some of the boat crews rolling huge drums of gasoline, already uncomfortably hot, down to the shore, and Sid Leggo, the Postmanager, holding aloft a lighted lantern to "see the fire," as he explained, a pink, crocheted tea-cosy adorning his bald pate, the spout drooping over his forehead.

No sooner was the gasoline out of the way than the men threw ladders up against the warehouse; HBC point-blankets were spread over the roof and thoroughly soaked as man after man sped up and down with bucketfuls

of water hauled from the river. Espying the huge wood-pile on fire, I commandeered the women and together we worked madly—heaving the heavy hot logs with blistered hands down onto the shore, my eyes, between times, glued to the warehouse. If our supplies and foodstuffs went up in smoke we would be in a precarious spot indeed. Literally, it would mean starvation for it was already too late in the season to get replacements sent in. I felt absolutely sick! By this time Edith Leggo was in hysterics, for her home, along with the Company's store, had been consumed and was now but smouldering ruins. However, ridiculous as it may appear, she seemed more concerned over the loss of her hair-switch!

Taking her up to the house, along with her small son, Donnie, I put them to bed and proceeded to make coffee and sandwiches for the fire-fighters, traipsing endlessly up and down the trail until around four-thirty in the morning when, to our vast relief, all danger had passed—and the warehouse had been saved.

I was just dropping off to sleep when I heard a commotion in the lower hall and went down to see what it was all about.

"Here's de money!" John James handed me a packet of charred bills. "De safe. . . it's *bust*!"

As he turned to leave he grinned satanically, then swung his hips like a hula dancer. He had Edith's switch attached to the seat of his trousers!

"You'd better not let Mrs. Leggo find you with that," I admonished, doubling up with laughter.

Next second he had joined his companions at the foot of the steps and off they went, whinnying and cavorting like skittish colts, to stand guard over the ruins for the rest of the night—just in case! Also, they went about retrieving the hams, sides of bacon and sacks of flour that

"Shorty" Jewell had packed home to his cabin as legitimate loot!

Late the following afternoon, all danger past, the crews embarked for the Outside. Never will I forget the tears which stung my eyes, nor the nostalgic longing which filled my soul as I watched the scows till they disappeared around the bend of the river. At that moment I felt as though gigantic doors had been slammed in our faces, doors which would cut us off completely from civilization, except for the monthly mail-packet, until break-up the following May.

Ever since the Leggos had landed at Fort Fitzgerald to replace Mr. Kelly, Mary Larocque had been doing their laundry, as well as mine, and I often told Mary to do Edith's first since she had a small child and needed things more quickly. Whether it was the upset over the fire or just simply Edith's general Ottawa-conscious intolerance I'll never know. Suffice it to say she was no sooner settled in her new quarters, a three-roomed log building near the riverbank, than she went to the mat with Mary because a couple of tea-towels hadn't been properly ironed. Had she gone to Mary and spoken quietly nothing would have happened. Instead, she wrote a note in which she referred not only to the towels but to Mary's unfortunate poverty, and climaxed everything by saying that Mary was "damned lucky" to even have the privilege of doing anything for her! Alas for Edith! She completely discounted and overlooked one outstanding facet of Mary's character and that was her fiery, unbending, Cree-Scots pride.

No sooner had the note been delivered by John James than I spied Mary streaking through our back garden with long, angry strides, her voluminous skirt billowing like sails and the enormous wart on her nose quivering like a feather—a sure sign that she was out for blood!

"Mrs. Godschell!" she burst into the house, a cascade of profanity spilling from her trembling lips. "I'm no wash for no more damn white womans. . . no more damn *muchistim* white womans. . . I'm. . ."

"Mary," I interrupted, "you and I have always been friends. You've been doing my laundry ever since I've been here. We have never had any trouble and I want things to continue that way. I have no part in this upset. Quarrel with Mrs. Leggo if you wish to but—*please leave me out of it!*"

"Wah! Wah! I'm sorry," her eyes softened. "I'm look after you like always 'cause you *have* been my frien' but . . . BUT," her voice again rose shrilly, "you watch me fix dat damn womans. She's no treat me like dirt!"

Next second she was gone. Mary's explosive temper was notorious, decidedly bad medicine for anyone who tampered with it, and we wondered what the consequences would be for Edith.

We were all set to go for a walk when a sudden, blood-curdling war-whoop rent the still air and we saw Mary streaking past the house, her daughter Dorothy in the rear—both of them dragging sheets and other articles through the gooiest, thickest mud puddles on the trail, and I gasped as I watched the berserk squaw stop every few steps to trample Edith's sheets and clothes deeper into the mud and, at the same time, scream vilely at Dorothy to do likewise. By this time the entire settlement was in a turmoil, the raucous laughter of a knot of trappers and traders only adding fuel to the fires of Mary's blinding wrath.

Reaching Edith's house she screamed savagely again, kicked open the door and, with a Herculean heave, catapulted the offending wash inside. Snatching the rest of it from Dorothy's quivering hand she swung it wildy over her head then tossed it through the door just as the, by

now, terrified Edith bolted for the safety of the Company's makeshift store.

"Talk about the Red Woman's Revengel!" Phil was choking with laughter. I'll bet this will teach Edith a lesson on how *not* to handle the natives in future!"

Truly, there was never a dull moment when the volatile Mary went on the warpath!

Winter set in early. Soon the Indians and trappers were checking over their gear, making ready for the long, bitter days on the trapline trails in the snow-blanketed woods, and the red men getting their fall fur debts from the traders. Already, the seasonal fur war had commenced and all the old jealousies and hatreds had again cropped up, but they didn't worry me now. My only worry was the resurgence of gossip which had ensued after Mrs. Wise had spent a few days at the barracks with the Blanks. As usual, I was their *bête noir* and scarcely a day passed without my being informed via the *moccasin telegraph* of all that had passed between them. As a matter of fact, the gossip had become so vicious by this time that even the Cards, as well as Major Burwash and others, had advised me that it was high time I was doing something about it.

"But—what *can* I do?" I remonstrated. "There is no civil law in this country. The only law around here is that laid down by Percival and Blank, and you know just how far I'd get were I to go to the Inspector and complain. He is so deeply prejudiced in favour of the Blanks, despite the disparity in their worldly stations, that my errand would be worse than useless."

"I'll grant you everything you say, Jean," Mrs. Card admitted, "but the situation has become so bad, thanks to your treating it with innocent indifference, that your friends are really becoming alarmed and feel you *should* do something!"

Late on the afternoon of November 24, I was seated in our living-room, finishing off the gifts I was sending Outside for Christmas, when I saw Bella Blank ambling past the house with one of the Wise girls in tow. As she wended her way to the Lamson and Hubbard house for her usual afternoon tea with Mrs. Copping everything Mrs. Card had said flooded back and some indefinite urge caused me to get my coat and drape it over the back of my chair. Slowly the hands crept around the clock until, just as dusk had fallen, I observed her returning.

"Here she comes, Phil!" I involuntarily cried as I slipped into my coat.

"Who's coming?" he asked, emerging from his study. "What's all the excitement about?"

"Mrs. Blank!" I was heading for the front door. "I've, at last, decided it's time to have a talk with her and put an end to this vile gossip and slander."

"I agree," his voice was crisp. "Go to it. Bishop Breynot and I have already warned Percival about this loose talk getting out of hand. But," he said, "don't hit her!"

As I crossed the trail my indignation was divided between Phil, at his mere suggestion that I *might* strike the creature since I'd never raised my hand to anyone in my life, and by the presence of the person who had caused me so much unwarranted trouble.

"Mrs. Blank," I called, "I would like to have a word with you."

"Hello, Mrs. Godsell," she simpered, not altogether sure of herself. "How are you?"

"The state of my constitution," I retorted, "is of no importance to you now, nor at any time. What I want you to explain is *why* you have taken it upon yourself to slander and libel me, as you have been doing for the past fourteen months!"

"Huh!" She gave me an insolent leer. "What do you intend to do about it?"

At that moment she raised her right hand. Whether she was going to flick her hair, her hat, shuffle the ragged fur around her neck or strike at me only God and Bella Blank will ever know. Before I knew what I was doing my hand lashed out and I saw the livid imprint upon her face! For a second I thought I'd broken my wrist. With a yelp of terror the Wise youngster streaked out of sight.

"You're . . . you're a dirty coward!" she whimpered, tears streaming from her eyes. "Striking a poor, defenceless woman with a child. You call yourself a lady. . . *you're* no lady!"

"Mrs. Blank," I was trembling with rage, "it's *you* who is the dirty coward. Anyone who'd sink so low that she'd try and wreck another's reputation without cause or reason is the most deadly, *contemptible* kind of coward and I, for one, am determined I'm no longer going to be your whipping-boy."

Blinded by a curtain of flaming red, I reached out, caught her by the coat-collar and smashed my fist into her face. For the next few minutes I thrashed the trembling, snivelling creature within an inch of her life, and sent her crawling, and moaning back to the barracks with the warning that if, on any future occasion, she as much as dared mention my name this would be but a infinitesimal sample of what she would get the next time.

"What a nice little lady you turned out to be!" Phil was standing at the door, eyeing me with mock severity. "I thought I told you not to hit her!"

"I couldn't help myself," my voice was quivering with excitement. "Tell me—did I give her enough? Will I go out and give her some more?"

At that moment we heard the sound of excited voices at the back of the house. Going through to the kitchen I

found John James with a long line of Indians, all headed by the Chief. "*Minawsin! Minawsin!*" came their guttural grunts. "Good! Good!"

"Dat damn Bella Blank," John interpreted for the delegation, "she mak' it trouble all de time. Dem Injuns," he swept the group with a wave of his hand, "dey come to tell you dey happy as hell. Dat's why dey wan' for shake you by de han'!"

No sooner had the dusky deputation departed, their faces wreathed in smiles, than Major Burwash, Hugh Brownlee and Gordon Cummings entered. "Jean," tears of mirth were streaming down the Major's face, "I've seen many funny things during my days in the Yukon but your performance this evening has topped them all. Permit me to congratulate you. *That* lady has had this coming for a long time. And—*you* such a little woman!"

"Five feet of compressed dynamite!" chuckled Hugh admiringly.

"But . . . but . . ." I stammered, "there was no one around whilst I was cleaning up on her!"

"That's what you think," Hugh exploded with mirth. "You were so busy giving her what-for you were oblivious to the fact that everyone in the settlement, even the Indians, was standing around—all rooting for you. We just pulled in from Fort Smith," his eyes were dancing with glee, "in time to get a grandstand view. *Congratulations!*"

"Jean," the Major was still chuckling, "you've graduated as an honest-to-God *sourdough*. Here Gordon, bring that bottle of rum from my grip. We'll mix her up an Ice-Worm cocktail!"

Early the following morning Henry Larocque appeared and handed Phil a letter, stating that Corporal Blank wanted an immediate reply.

Tearing open the envelope he read:

Fort Fitzgerald, Alberta.
25.11.1922.

P. H. Godsell,
H. B. Co.,
Fitzgerald.

Mrs. Blank informs me that when she was passing your residence yesterday, your Wife came out of your house and assaulted her. I shall expect an immediate apology from your Wife for this. I look to you to impress on your Wife that we live in a supposedly respectable community, and it is not customary for respectable women to fight on a public highway. If this apology is not forthcoming, I shall see what steps I can take to ensure that respectable women can use the public streets without being molested by your Wife.

You, of course, realize that molesting peaceable persons on the public highway is an offence under the criminal code and can be dealt with as such. However, I am reluctant to take this course, and am prepared to accept an apology from your Wife, when this matter will be dropped. I know that your Wife has had no occasion to behave in this manner towards Mrs. Blank.

I am utterly at a loss to understand how a woman in your Wife's position could behave in such a manner.

(Signed) William Blank.¹

"Apology be *damned!*" Phil exploded, his face purple with anger. "Go back to the barracks, Henry, and tell that yellow-livered skunk I'll give him an apology all right. . . the kind he *will* understand. Tell him to meet me at the forks of the trail, by "Shorty" Jewell's house, in fifteen minutes . . . to leave his red serge behind and we'll have this out, man to man!"

Needless to say, the Corporal didn't turn up!

All that day our house was like a beehive as 'breeds,

¹This letter is still in my possession.

Indians and trappers streamed in and out to congratulate me upon my victory. I never before saw a more exuberant lot of people in all my life. Then, to my amazement, a dog-carriole pulled up in front of the house and out stepped Mrs. Card.

"Am I ever glad to see you!" Impulsively I threw my arms around her and kissed her warmly on the cheek.

"I am very glad of that for," she replied precisely, "I intend to stay with you for a week. When word of your pugilistic bout with Bella Blank reached Fort Smith last evening via the *moccasin telegraph* Gerald and I decided there was but one thing to do—for me to come and stay with you to show these wretched people that you *do* have friends—friends who admire and respect you!"

"The Company has its 'Seal of Quality,'" I laughed. "Now you're placing the 'Seal of Approval and Respectability' upon me!"

"*Exactly!* You should have done this months ago. Gerald and I are are delighted," she burst into silvery laughter, "absolutely delighted with you!"

"Percival is furious," I laughed, "but, *mark my words*—some day both he and his wife will apologize to me for what has happened!"

But the grapevine from the barracks indicated that anything but delight reigned in that quarter. "All night long," one of the police boys told me, "Percival and Blank were hunched over the Criminal Code in search of some technicality they could get you on. I believe," he chuckled, "they're thinking of charging you with 'assaulting a woman in a pregnant condition!'"

"A *what?*" I gasped, my voice quivering with mirth. "Why, she's been married for twenty years, yet all she's got around the place is a collie dog and the Mounted Police fence!"

No more was ever heard from the barracks, but the

punishment meted out to Mrs. Blank proved a salutary lesson indeed. Thenceforth, scandalous tongues became magically silenced everywhere. "Whenever I want a little fun," Hugh Brownlee told me, "all I have to do is tell Mrs. Wise, who's twice your size, that you're on your way across the portage and she scuttles for cover like a scared rabbit!"

Amusingly enough, that battle had a couple of unique aftermaths for it became the "A.D." and "B.C." on the Indians' calendar and for many years thereafter, events were reckoned as "so many winters before" or "so many winters after Mrs. Godsell beat up Bella Blank"! Then, five years later, an Indian approached my husband at Fontas Post on the Sickannie Chief River, a thousand miles away. "You remember me, Mr. Godsell?" he grinned widely.

"Can't say I do!" Phil replied.

"Why, Mr. Godsell", his voice was filled with reproach, "you *should*. I was in jail at Fort Fitzgerald when Mrs. Blank came crawling into the barracks on hands and knees, with two black eyes, after Mrs. Godsell beat her up!" he ended proudly.

While Phil was away on his inspection trip in January, Rosa invited me to a native *Give-Away Dance* which was to be held in Big Cheesé's house in honour of the medicine man who had arrived a few days before from Fort Chipewyan. Having heard a great deal about these dances, I was curious and accepted the invitation with alacrity for it was quite an honour. Seldom was any white invited.

No sooner had the guns been fired off to denote the dance was about to start than Rosa's brother, Dolly, appeared with his dog-team to drive me over. Entering the small shack we found it filled to over-flowing, with Indians, squaws and papooses lining the walls in stolid solemnity. Squatted in the centre of the room by the

stove, the medicine man was singing one of his sacred songs, beating time on the resonant tom-tom in his left hand, the feather in his brown, high-crowned hat, bobbing rhythmically with each guttural "A-ha! A-ha! A-ha!"

The song ended; there was a sudden surge. Gay bucks approached the ladies of their choice, handed them a gaudy silk scarf, a slab of dried meat, a shawl, a plug of tobacco or a pair of moccasins, and so forth then, holding the article between them and the man ahead, they commenced a *Lame* dance around the stove, the cadence of the drum rising and falling in a weird volume of barbaric sound. Big Chcesé approached and held out a dollar bill, which I caught by one corner; then we joined the revellers. I don't know who was the *most* Indian there that night for, suffice it to say, the barbaric rhythm of the tom-tom has the same effect upon me as had the bagpipes upon my "savage, haggis-eating" ancestors in days of old.

After a supper of boiled muskrats, beaver paws and tails, roasted caribou meat, the inevitable bannock and strong black tea, we continued to make merry and I managed to get rid of the pile of scarves and trinkets which Rosa had purchased for me for the occasion. Dawn was breaking when Dolly drove me home. It was a fascinating experience and I enjoyed it fully. In the old days, Phil told me later, horses, saddles, guns—any treasured possessions—were exchanged at these affairs. Sometimes, even wives—whether treasured or not!

True to Phil's prediction, Corporal Blank, after parading up and down the slippery rocks between the post and the barracks all winter, finally passed a bunch of thoroughly unprime skins. Parcelling them up, he sent them to the Company's lawyer in Edmonton, along with Blank's signed slip and Lot number, and asked what

authority Blank had to pass judgment on any furs when he evidently didn't know unprime skins from prime, as was shown only too plainly by his passing the ones now being forwarded. When the case finally came up in Edmonton a decision was rendered in favour of the Company. The furs were returned to my husband; Blank and Percival were severely censured, and changes were made in the Game and Fisheries Act to prevent any repetition of such unwarranted official interference.

Finally, to add insult to injury, I won the Ice Pool that spring despite the fact that some of the police crowd had gotten Ben Herschel and Mike Burns to break the days down into hours to be sure that they would be the lucky ones. By the time I got around to placing my bet I had no choice. The only hour, and day, left was seven a.m. May 15! When Mrs. Card and I strolled past the Northern Trader's post in the afternoon, Mike Burns was chatting with Corporal Blank and Constable Williams, both looking exceedingly glum. It was too much for his Irish hellery! "Mrs. Godsell," he called out, his face bisected with a wide grin, "What are you going to buy with the money?"

"A silver tea service and tray, And," I smiled, "I shall have the tray engraved with the inscription—'Presented to Mrs. Godsell with the *love* and *esteem* of the *ladies* of Fort Fitzgerald!'"

Despite her Victorian dignity, Mrs. Card's laughter could be heard all over the fort as we headed for the house.

Four years later my prophecy concerning the Percivals apologizing to me for what had happened was fulfilled. As we stood in the rotunda of the Macdonald Hotel in Edmonton, an arm sneaked around my shoulder and a kiss was implanted upon my cheek. To my astonishment,

I turned and found myself looking into the smiling face of Mrs. Percival, with her husband, equally friendly, standing just behind us.

When they spent that evening with us in our room they apologized for all that had happened those first two years at Fort Fitzgerald. They had, they assured us, received nothing but contempt and contumely at Corporal Blank's hands after moving over from Fort Fitzgerald to Fort Smith as a reward for their misplaced kindnesses and trust. And, when their dwelling on the barracks grounds at Fort Smith was caught in a holocaust and burned to the ground, along with all their beautiful antique furniture, silver and other treasures they had brought there, the Corporal failed to make any attempt to avert the loss! Incidentally, the late Corporal Art Blake also confirmed this latter statement when he visited us in Winnipeg around 1932-1933, for he was stationed at Fort Smith at the time.

10.

Christmas on the Frozen Frontier

On September 19, 1927, after a sojourn at Fort St. John in the shadow of the Canadian Rockies near the headwaters of the magnificent Peace with its verdant hills and mighty canyon, wherein dinosaur tracks were to be found, we arrived back at Fort Fitzgerald. Since this was our wedding anniversary we were in time to celebrate it with the Leggos, Sid having been our best man, as well as Guy Blanchette of Ottawa who had just completed a survey of Great Slave Lake, and the Reverend Dr. and Mrs. McQueen of Edmonton, whose daughter Helen, and her friend Helen McGregor, a magnificent pianist, I had entertained at Fort St. John earlier that summer.

Next morning, with the ever-faithful John James as driver, we were rolling once again into the familiar surroundings of Fort Smith, diminutive capital of the Northwest Territories, which was now to be our headquarters. Before my eyes arose the same old fort-like Hudson's Bay post, and the Roman Catholic Mission on top of the hill overlooking the same old scattering of Indian cabins and opposition stores.

During our absence Lockie Burwash's "Government House" had been converted into a Mining Recorder's office while the former two-man Mounted Police barracks

had been enlarged into Headquarters for "G" Division, with six dapper constables under the command of Inspector C. Trundell. Down the Bell Rock trail the tall antennas of the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals tusked the sky, betokening civilization's gradual penetration into the Silent Places. Apart from this the settlement was little changed.

In trading post and cabin the Mounted Police still rubbed shoulders with buffalo rangers; sun-bronzed rivermen still hobnobbed with moccasined trappers, and dog-drivers in caribou-skin *parkis* still made love to Slavey beauties. One thing, however, did amuse me and that was the way the white wives of recently-arrived Government employees tripped the trails in French-heeled shoes and fashionable dresses, and aped the ways of Ottawa with their white gloves, visiting cards, pink teas and other absurdities as out of place in the North as a buffalo coat would be in the South Seas. Talk about "Queen Anne fronts and Mary Ann behinds!" Fort Smith was still living up to its time-worn reputation for ridiculous snobbery and social prestige which had made it a laughingstock the length and breadth of the land!

Not least amongst these outstanding characters was Mr. Mahoney. An ex-trapper, he had advanced sufficiently far on the social ladder to become the one and only *butcher* between Edmonton and Fort Smith. So distinguished and important did he feel that he became almost apoplectic when anyone was indiscreet enough to recall *how* he had acquired his wealth, and even momentary failure to treat him with proper deference meant to get in his black books—and do without meat!

Wearing a dirty black sweater, greasy trousers, moccasins and sloppy cap, with the inevitable "chaw" of tobacco in his cheek, he would make the rounds every morning "gathering the latest news," unthinkingly

keeping the place in a constant state of turmoil and upheaval. Sunday, however, was his big day. Splendidly attired in pink shirt, pea-green cravat, formal striped trousers, swallowtail coat, beaded moccasins and the most startling black-and-white checked cap imaginable, he would dutifully attend Mass, parade through the entire settlement afterwards to be admired, then head for Joe Lanouette's whitewashed, log restaurant for lunch. One Sunday he invited me to be his guest.

"As you see," he addressed the obese and knock-kneed Dora Ratfat, "I have *Mrs.* Godsell with me today. Since her husband is *the* head official of the Hudson's Bay Company,"—the "culture" was really oozing—"I want you to do things *properly!*"

All went well until Dora lurched towards him with a heavy granite mug of coffee in her hand, her ebony thumb halfway down inside. In a second his Sunday polish vanished. Furiously, he glared at the Dog-Rib girl, a streak of husky oaths spluttering off his lips. "Why, you . . . you dirty black-faced Injun," he roared. "Take your g--d----- thumb outta my bloody coffee!"

"Oh! that's all right, *Mis-ter* Mahoney," she grinned, setting the mug before him. "Don't worry—it's not hot!"

Amongst the new arrivals was Miss Catt, one of the grandest people I ever met in the North. A small, dumpy Englishwoman, who wore her hair in a bun at the back of her head and dressed rather severely, she had done considerable missionary work in Lima, Peru, ere venturing into the frozen North to reopen the small, long-since-abandoned Anglican church. Once settled in her tiny log cabin she formed the habit of dropping in frequently to have a chat with me. One afternoon, whilst having tea, she suggested she would like to start an Auxiliary, and asked what I thought of the idea. "Will there," she inquired, "be enough women to make it worth while?"

I assured her there were, and that every one of them would welcome the opportunity of meeting periodically since such gatherings would be a pleasant change indeed in the somewhat lonely routine of their lives. "However, Miss Catt," I added, "there is one stipulation I'd like to make ere I'll consent to join and that is, at our very first meeting, you make it clear to the members that no gossip will be tolerated at any time, otherwise you can count me out. My reason for insisting upon this," I added, "is because gossip has been the source of endless trouble all over this country, as I well know to my cost. I loathe it, and don't want to be present when anyone indulges in that dangerous pastime."

"What about Mrs. Wise?" she asked. "I understand you had quite a bit of trouble with her over gossip at one time."

"I did! As you know, the Mounted Police boys have always made our place their home. Mrs. Wise had plenty to say about that years ago, and I know she is, again, up to her old tricks. She just can't help herself, imbued as she is with all the weaknesses of the native and their partiality for that sort of thing. However," I ended, "as long as she behaves herself as best she can, and doesn't make any more trouble, I shall be perfectly courteous."

Like the good sort she was, Miss Catt laid down the law very nicely but I had to smile as I felt the eyes of my former antagonist boring into mine. She knew, full well, I was behind the ultimatum and she flushed to the roots of her hair when I caught her eye. At that moment I knew, whilst she would never love me, she would never take another chance on openly crossing swords with me.

Each night the police boys—Corporals Art Blake and Lorne Halliday, as well as Constables Burstall, Woods, Syms and Larry Bassler—congregated in our house, along with Walter Johnson, the Company's engineer who, a

few years before had, with rare ingenuity, built the now world-famed *Moose-Glue Prop* for Captain Gorman when the two Imperial Oil Company's planes crashed at Fort Simpson in the spring of 1921. What a jolly lot they were! Between games, sing-songs around the piano, hikes through the woods and other activities, to say nothing of their perpetual good humour and laughter, there was never a dull moment. To such an extent did I become identified with them that they, jocularly, dubbed me with the soubriquet "The Mascot"!

Soon it became a regular habit for them to dine with us during the weekends whilst, on the occasion of their birthdays, I would prepare a special dinner and present the honoured one with some small gift. Ultimately, we included the various holidays throughout the year thus we always had some special event to look forward to to break the isolation. During the summer we would go on hikes and picnics whilst, between times, we would paddle down to Three Mile Island and indulge in target practice. In the fall we would hunt partridge, and other small game. Then, when the icy fingers of the Frost King clutched the land in his iron grip, out would come the *carrioles* and we would careen along the trails or through the snow-mushroomed forest to the silvery tinkle of the dog-bells and the *yip! yip!* of excited huskies.

Each morning, around eleven o'clock, Inspector Trundell would drop in for a chat and a cup of tea. "Polly," as he was affectionately known because of his love for a horse he had once owned by that name, was the type of officer and gentleman who had built up and maintained the splendid reputation and traditions the Force enjoys the world over. Tall, slender, and quiet-spoken, he handled his men with a finesse and tact which commanded their utmost respect. I always enjoyed seeing

him for despite his somewhat retiring attitude he nevertheless possessed a delightful sense of quiet humour.

One bitter afternoon, whilst the Auxiliary was in session, I glanced up from my sewing in time to catch little Nadine Griswold before she got too close to the red-hot stove. Picking her up, I set her upon my lap and started playing with her.

"Mrs. Godsell," Miss Catt remarked, "you are so fond of children. What a pity you have none of your own. Tell me, please, why have you no family?"

"I guess Santa Claus doesn't know where I live!" I replied.

"Don't be facetious, my dear. Do tell me!" she insisted.

At that moment I glimpsed a fleeting leer on Mrs. Wise's face which made me boil for I knew, full well, she had never put the nicest interpretation on my friendship with the men with whom I had associated. Also, nine years in the North, mingling with all types, had, I must admit, provided me with a vocabulary that, under certain circumstances, was apt to be more expressive than polite.

"Miss Catt," I replied, fighting to restrain my indignation at her thoughtless prying, "I can't explain why but I will you tell one thing and that is . . . I wouldn't want to have a child whilst living in this God-forsaken country because, the moment it was born, all my damned neighbours would be in to look it over to see if it had a beaver skin in its hand . . . or a yellow stripe down its leg!"

When I turned and stared straight at Mrs. Wise I wanted to laugh. Her countenance was fiery red and, for the rest of the afternoon, she was the very personification of embarrassment.

"Well, what have you been up to now?" Phil greeted me when he returned a few weeks later.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

Then, to my complete astonishment, he related that, late one night, a band of Indians had dropped into his camp on Great Slave Lake, hundreds of miles to the northward, and, with guttural chuckles of delight, had related in Cree all the details of this episode to his Indian dog drivers. So much for the range of the *moccasin telegraph*!

Late in November Miss Catt and I decided it would be fun to stage a Christmas concert, an idea enthusiastically received by all the members of the Auxiliary. Putting our heads together we sketched out a short Christmas play, lined up other items to round off the programme, then proceeded to put the children through their paces every afternoon after school. Between times, I busied myself making costumes for them with the aid of their mothers, as well as an outfit for Phil, who had been delegated to play the role of Santa Claus. "What a lovely opportunity," I remarked to Miss Catt, "for him to wear the Santa Claus mask I bought the last time we were Outside!"

Night after night for the next few weeks our house looked as though a cyclone had struck it as members of the Auxiliary and the police boys snipped and sewed and piled up a heap of mosquito-netting bags which were filled with candies for the children; fashioned decorations for the tree from cardboard, silver cigarette-paper and yards of green, red and yellow ribbon, or jostled merrily around the kitchen baking pies, cakes, tarts and the ham which were to be my contribution to the dinner the ladies were serving in the Conibear Hotel on the night of the concert.

Late on the afternoon of *the* day Mickey Ryan's flat-sleds arrived with mail, parcels, and two large frozen turkeys, hauled five hundred miles from Edmonton, which

John James deposited on the kitchen table along with two huge boxes containing an amazing assortment of fancy dates, raisins, salted nuts, preserved ginger; wicker trays of crystallized fruits, jars of olives and other treasures too numerous to mention—all the gift of Brian Burstall, whose family had sent the boxes from his home in Quebec.

"It was like opening Aladdin's cave," I told him when he came over from the barracks a short time later. "You are really very very kind. What a grand treat . . . what a swish addition all will be to our Christmas dinner!"

"Now, remember to be outside the church around ten o'clock," I warned Brian and Phil as we left the hotel after the community dinner. "The moment you hear *Jingle Bells* come in—that's Santa's cue!"

Next second they were gone, wending their way to the barracks, the frosty air filled with their gay repartee and laughter.

The children were wonderful and the concert proceeded without a hitch. Sitting behind a curtain at one side of the dais, I managed to defrost part of the small window pane with the palm of my hand in order to watch for Brian and Phil. Seated at the organ, Miss Catt finally swung into *Jingle Bells* and the treble of childish voices filled the room. At that moment one of the Loverock boys glanced past me just as Phil's masked face appeared without.

"There . . . there's *Santa*!" he yelled, pointing in my direction, the song forgotten. "THERE'S SANTA CLAUS!"

Next moment a roar of hilarious laughter filled the frigid outdoors.

"Burstall!" my husband's muffled voice rang out. "BURSTALL! You blankety-blank-blank . . . Get me out of here . . . GET ME OUT OF HERE!"

Whatever had happened, all Brian could do was laugh uncontrollably as Phil continued to yell blue murder and emit dire threats.

By this time all eyes had swung in the direction of the window whilst Miss Catt, her face flushed crimson, primly pounded out *Jingle Bells* until I thought the organ-bellows would burst. I caught Inspector Trundell's eye and realized he was having a hard time keeping his mirth under control.

Momentarily, the noise outside subsided, then the door flew open and into the room staggered my two blithe spirits, Brian in gales of laughter and Phil . . . the most dilapidated Santa Claus one ever saw! His mask was twisted to one side, giving him more the appearance of a gargoyle than the beneficent old gentleman he was supposed to be. The cotton-batting trimming on his costume, which I had worked so hard to attach, was in bits and pieces everywhere from his head to his feet, whilst the back of his costume sported a long, ragged tear which flapped in the breeze like a pennant! At that moment I was filled with anything but the spirit of Peace on Earth—goodwill to men!

Weaving their way to the dais, Brian proceeded to cut the gifts from the tree and handed them to Santa, who passed them on to the respective recipients, their badinage and Brian's teasing quips almost drowned in the volume of boisterous laughter which filled the room as the assemblage literally rolled in their seats, their eyes streaming with tears.

"Thank goodness that's over," I thought to myself as I watched Brian snip the last gift from the tree but—alas! It was for the wife of sub-Inspector Gagnon of the Mounted Police, a gentleman who had boasted so much of his army career that, to listen to him, one would think he had won the First World War all by himself.

"Oh! Santa . . . Oh! SANTA!" Brian broke into a wild dance and cavorted around like a whirling Dervish. "Here is a gift," he broke into gales of laughter, "*for the wife of the Unknown soldier!*"

"*Madame Gagnon!*" Phil bellowed then stepped forward and handed it to the highly embarrassed and discomfited lady.

At this, Inspector Trundell went utterly limp with laughter and reeled helplessly from the church, vainly wiping his eyes with his handkerchief.

"What on earth happened?" I asked as the three of us made our way homeward beneath the stars.

"When we left the barracks," Brian chuckled, "we decided to take a short-cut through the barbed-wire fence and Phil got his costume and whiskers snagged. Then, when the Loverock lad espied him, he stepped back and disappeared in that eight-foot hole from which earth had been taken to bank up the church in the fall."

Back at the house we found Lorne Halliday playing his favourite song, *Abdul-a-bul-bul-Ameer* on his mouth-organ, Walter Johnson accompanying him on the piano, whilst Jack Woods was busily engaged stowing gifts he had brought in from Edmonton beneath the tree. Late the previous fall Jack had escorted an insane Indian woman to the Outside and had only returned a few hours before, having made the trip from Fort McMurray, some five hundred miles away, by dog-team. To my joy, amongst other things he brought me were scads of new music so the old piano rang right merrily until the wee sma' hours, our voices blending in a cacophony of sound that, whilst not Metropolitan material, suited the occasion.

In the meantime, Bill Schaeffer, the buffalo ranger; Joe Lanouette, the rotund, bald-headed French *restaurateur*, as he loved to call himself, with the shrill, piping voice; and Jimmy Donovan, the aging but wirey old-

timer who worked as skinner for Mickey Ryan, joined us, Jimmy and Halliday accompanying the piano on their mouth-organs. Pouring a drink, Joe shrilled: "*Jim-ee!*" "You are ze bes' frien' in ze whole worl'. Me! I'm nevaire 'ave a frien' lak you." He raised the glass to his lips. "*Bon santé!*"

"You're a hell of a good guy yourself, Joe. Come on, gimme a drink then let's go to the Halfway and wish Mickey a Merry Christmas!"

I chuckled as the "love birds" went through the door, arm in arm, swearing undying friendship.

"What a pair!" Lorne laughed as the thin voice of Jimmy shouted "*Marche!*" to the dogs and the jangling of bells faded in the distance.

No sooner had the troops left for the barracks a couple of hours later than our telephone rang. Picking up the receiver, I said "Hello!"

"*Madame* Godsell . . ." Joe's voice was thick with sobs.

"What on earth is wrong?" I asked.

"*Madame!* It's dat *diable*, Jim-ee—my bes' frien'!" Joe was now sobbing harder than ever. "You see me now, *Madame*, you no know me. I 'ave ze black eyes—I 'ardly can see . . . an' my face! Dat Jim-ee, he's t'ink it punchin' bag," he gulped. "'e's beat ze hell outta me!"

"You'd better go to bed," I told him. "I'll see you later."

Barely able to contain myself, I replaced the receiver and told Phil what had happened. How we laughed!

Around eight o'clock in the morning Bill Schaeffer dropped in. "Mrs. Godsell," there was blood in his eye, "have you seen Jimmy Donovan?"

"No," I replied, "why?"

"Wa-al, if he isn't a sight for gods and men! He and Joe tangled after they left here last night, all over a crock of liquor. Jimmy slipped whilst mushing behind the dogs, the bottle flew out of his hip-pocket and broke

on the icy trail. That could happen to anyone! When Joe wanted another snort he accused Jimmy of stealing the bottle and beat him up. I'm going to the Halfway right now to fix that damned Pea-soup. He had no business beating up an old man like that." With a wave of his hand he departed.

When he returned some hours later his eyes were more angry than ever. *This time he was seeking Jimmy to avenge Joel!*

Ye gods! Life in the Lone Land was certainly never dull for me since, it seemed, every man-jack in the country had adopted me as his "mother confessor"!

Poor Joel! Kind-hearted to a degree, and as harmless as they come, he was bedevilled with the unhappy flair for letting his tongue land him with facile ease in more jams than one could count and I'll never forget the time Mary Taranjo, a native of dubious reputation, walked into his restaurant the day after her wedding.

"Dey tell me," Joe greeted her, his hands resting on his enormous stomach beneath his white apron, "dat, las' night, you get marry. Dat you wear wan fine white dress. What for *you* do dat? I t'ought only *virgins* get marry in white. You . . . *you* should 'ave been wearin' a great beeg black Injun shawl!"

On Christmas eve, being a devoted Catholic, Joe naturally attended Midnight Mass in the church upon the hill. Filled with the spirit of Christmas, he persisted in singing *Alouette* with vim and vigour each time the Priest paused until a nearby trapper, resenting what he called Joe's sacrilege, caught him up in his burly arms and tossed him out into a snowbank, Joe's shrill screams of protest further interrupting the service. "Dat damn *moonias*, Moise," he told me later, "him get mad 'cause he no onnerstan' good music!"

However, I was destined to lose my temper with Joe

this trip. On Christmas morning he appeared at the house a little the worse for wear, and insisted that the police boys and ourselves have lunch at the restaurant, explaining it would be much easier for me since I was having a large dinner party that night. At first, I demurred. Then, yielding to persuasion, I threw on my *parki* and hiked down the trail with the gang. Joe immediately produced a bottle and placed it on the table. Leaving my glass untouched I went into the kitchen only to find the stove stone cold—and no sign of lunch anywhere. For a while I waited then called to Woods. "Start the fire, Jack," I said impatiently. "I'll see what Joe has around here and cook the lunch myself. That's the only way we'll ever get anywhere."

At that particular moment Joe staggered in, eyes glowing, a big smile on his face and not a care in the world. "Give me the food," I said, "then go back and enjoy yourself. I'll do the cooking!"

Stepping towards the stove he withdrew a hand from beneath his apron and pointed to a frizzled, blackened object in a frying-pan that had once been a sausage and exclaimed bibulously: "Dere's your G--d----- lunch, you . . . ! ! ! !"

Whirling, blind with indignation, my fist shot out and contacted his solar plexus. Next second he spun like a top across the kitchen floor and landed, with feet and hands in the air, in the bottom of the empty woodbox where he lay squealing shrilly: "Help! Help! *HELP!*"

"What a punch! Oh! Jupiter . . . *what* a punch!" Convulsed with laughter, Lorne Halliday, an expert boxer, was clinging to the door-jamb, tears streaming down his cheeks, with my scandalized husband and the rest of the boys beside him.

As Christmas eve drew on, the shadows deepened from rose to purple through the ebony tracery of the

pinetrees. From the mud chimneys of the native huts white plumes of smoke rose in vertical columns into the sky while, through the frosted windows of cabins and trading posts, rosy rectangles of light sent probing fingers over the billowing drifts.

Around the kitchen, redolent with the aroma of roasting turkeys, Woods and I bustled about, putting the finishing touches to this and that in preparation for the feast whilst Phil and the others made the rounds of the Fort. About half an hour before the guests were due to arrive they returned. No sooner were they in the house than Phil decided he would empty the sanitary toilet so that the ladies wouldn't have to visit the "Library" in the sixty-below-zero temperature.

"You'll do no such thing," I snapped. "The guests will be here any time now so—just skip it. I had enough with Joe this morning. *This* party is going to be a nice one!"

"All right, old girl, all right," he grinned at Walter.

Throwing open the front door to cool off the house, I returned to the kitchen to make the gravy. Suddenly I heard a *thump! thump!* coming from the direction of the stairway. Tossing down the spoon, I sped to the front of the house with Woods and Halliday in time to see my beloved being swept downstairs by the weight of the can—then right through the door. As he reached the top step of the veranda his moccasin slipped on a spot of ice. He pitched forward and, in the twinkling of an eye, was lying flat on his stomach, his chin resting on the bottom of the can as the contents spread everywhere and froze.

"Atta boy, P. H.," Vic Ingraham bellowed with diabolical glee as he came through the gate with some of our guests. "Atta boy . . . thanks for the sweet-scented welcome!"

By seven o'clock we sat down to dinner. All around the room the flickering glow of the tall candles picked out

glinting tomahawks, peace pipes, bone breast-plates, eagle-tail headdresses and other Indian relics depending from the walls. Around long tables adorned with snowy linen, glittering silver, and centrepieces of artificial sweet peas and maidenhair fern, sat Walter Johnson and Burstall, Blake, Halliday and Woods in their gay red serges, the Vic Ingrahams, Jimmy Donovan, Bill Schaeffer, Katie and Mickey Ryan, the Dexters and Griswolds of the Signal Corps, opposition traders and trappers—twenty-two in all.

Whilst Vic and Phil, each at a long table, were carving the turkeys, Vic relating in his own inimitable manner how he “had been in all the jails in Siberia and the United States . . . but they threw me outta Sing Sing,” there came an unexpected interruption. “Shovel-Face” McPherson, a local dusky *fille de joie*, so named because of her lack of pulchritude, staggered in with Big Simon, one of my husband’s dog-drivers and her latest Light o’ Love. “Shay, Mish’us Goschell . . .” she hiccupped, “egsguse me . . . hic! I’ve bin drinkin’ Lis’erine. I’m a lil’ tight. Have you sheen my g--d--- falsh teesh?”

The laughter which followed this unusual inquiry was like an explosion. The house simply rocked.

“No, Liza,” I replied limply.

“Well,” she fixed me with an accusing eye, “I had ’em in my mouf when I’m bring dat presen’ lash night an’ . . . *I ain’t gottum now!*”

Meanwhile, Big Simon, the personification of embarrassment, sidled over to the chesterfield, lifted one of the cushions and held aloft a grinning set of dentures. “Me catch’um!” he grunted.

Joyfully, Liza grabbed them, popped them in her mouth and reeled towards the door, throwing a “Melly Knistmas!” over her shoulder.

Everyone was convulsed as she disappeared into the night.

"Good Lord!" Burstall was hugging himself in an agony of mirth. "I've never seen a house anywhere in my life where *more* funny things can happen!"

Dinner over, John James came in, rolled up the rugs and put them out on the veranda whilst Christine McPherson, Liza's mother, and one of the Mercredi girls cleared away the dishes and tables. That done, the kitchen was turned into a buffet, with Brian and Jack acting as bartenders. Seating himself at the piano, Bill Schaeffer pounded out the strains of the *Eightsome Reel*, accompanied by Jimmy on his mouth-organ. What Bill lacked in "Paderewskian" technique he certainly made up for in volume as Lorne, in the role of caller-off, intoned:

Lady round lady and the gent goes so;
And lady round the gent and the gent don't go;
Birdie fly out, and the Hawkie fly in,
Then Hawkie fly out and give Birdie a swing.

In gay abandon the crowd swung through the intricacies of the reel until there came the break-down.

Jump straight up and never come down,
An' swing your calico roun' and roun'.
You know where, and I don't care,
Place your baby in a high arm-chair.

As the happy revellers made for their seats Bill swung around and bellowed for a drink then his face crinkled. "Say," he exclaimed. "What the hell's that guy doing there?"

"Who?" squeaked Jimmy.

"That wall-eyed Swede," Bill erupted, pointing towards the chesterfield. "What's he doing, *an opposition man*, spying at a Hudson's Bay party?"

I smiled as I glanced at the snoring Olsen, who had

entered unnoticed. "He'd be lucky if he could tell me his own name at this moment let alone 'spy'!" I replied.

"Well," snapped the diminutive but hard-boiled Bill, "I don't like it. He's gonna git out of here *right now!*"

With a mighty heave he swung the sleeping trader over his shoulder, opened the kitchen door and proceeded at a dog-trot across the moonlight square towards the opposition post. Halting by the barbed-wire fence he drew a deep breath, tossed the sleeping six-footer over into a deep snowdrift and crawled under. A second later he appeared before the opposition establishment, kicked open the door and tossed poor Olsen upon the floor. "Here you guys," he snarled. "Put your damned Swede under lock an' key so he won't git wanderin' where he's not wanted. If I catch him spying at a Hudson's Bay party again it's gonna be *just too bad for him!*"

For a week the fun continued, our house being filled day and night with the celebrants as we prepared for the next big show of the season—Our New Year's Eve masquerade dance! I always had a soft spot in my heart for the natives and liked to see them enjoying themselves, especially during the festive season. Thus some years before, in order to break the monotony of life, I had thought up this bright idea—and staged the very *first* masquerade dance ever held in the North! Now, thanks to the advent of the radio, I had another bright thought. Why not get one of the American stations to broadcast a programme of music for us? Immediately, I wrote to one of the leading stations. Back came their reply. They would be delighted, they said, to accede to my request and—it wouldn't cost me one cent! The very novelty of providing entertainment for a handful of exiles on Canada's frozen frontier, and being able to advertise the fact that they were doing so, would be payment enough. In jig-time the staff of the Signal Corps, along with Walter

Johnson and the police boys, were busily engaged wiring the two large rooms in the Conibear Hotel, where the dance was to be held.

"What am I going to wear?" Walter asked one evening as I was working on my ballerina costume.

"Why not go as *The Lady that's known as Lou?*" I laughed.

"A fine 'lady' you'll make!" Woods grinned.

"O.K." Walter emitted a throaty chuckle. "Where can I get a costume?"

"I'll fix you up," I told him. "Come upstairs."

An hour later, as Phil was coming down the trail from the trading post, the front door flew open. Out shot a husky, male figure in glittering sequin evening gown, waving a pair of brawny arms and swearing vociferously. Steadying the wreath which encircled his bald pate, he proceeded to belabour a pair of wildly-fighting huskies with a stick of cordwood. Then, picking up one huge dog by the tail, and the other by the scruff of the neck, he tossed them over the fence into the roadway. Next second Burstall stumbled out onto the veranda, choking with laughter. Seizing Walter, he picked up his wreath and willow-plume fan from the snow and escorted him back into the house.

"Well," Phil laughed as the belligerent Walter subsided into a chair, muttering imprecations, "what's going on here?"

"Meet *The Lady that's known as Lou,*" groaned Brian, his shoulders heaving with mirth.

"Shut up!" growled the "lady" with a shame-faced grin.

"When Walter saw himself in the mirror," Halliday laughed, "he was so overcome with his own pulchritude he insisted upon sitting down at the piano and playing 'Old Love Letters Tied with a Ribbon of Blue!'"

Phil chuckled gleefully.

"That's the trouble, P.H.," broke in Woods with an impish grin. "His own music made him cry then, when he started to sing, the huskies started to howl. The rest you saw for yourself! Those huskies ruined his *one* great moment!"

Despite the bitter cold of New Year's eve the hotel was filled to over-flowing by nine o'clock and soon the dance was under way. What a show that turned out to be! The originality of the costumes was something to marvel at. Even the natives had entered wholeheartedly into the scheme of things. Christine McPherson made a perfect *Aunt Jemima*; Shovel-Face, her daughter, and Elizabeth Mercredi, were *The Gold Dust Twins*; Johnny Behrens was *Charlie Chaplin* and, thus, it went whilst, amongst the whites the Griswolds were a pair of *Goofey Golfers*; Burstall and Bassler were *Spark Plug*; Inspector Gagnon was a *Highlander*, replete with potato-sacking kilt, and carrots for a sporran; his wife an *Egyptian Dancing Girl*, and Walter as *The Lady that's known as Lou*. Phil, attired in one of his beautiful Indian costumes, was an Indian chief, whilst I was a ballerina.

Between the radio music, the squeaking of fiddles, the cries of the caller-off and the excited whoops and cries of the dancers, the place was a bedlam, and the fun fast and furious until, at the break of the New Year's dawn, we wended our weary way home along the snowy trail.

We were just dozing off when the strains of the *Dead March in Saul* erupted outside to the accompaniment of raucous laughter. The din was enough to wake the dead! Next moment I heard the troops yelling: "Mrs. P. H. . . . JEAN . . . come here!"

Tossing on a robe, I slipped downstairs to find Burstall, Woods and Halliday bringing Walter in on an old door—

my sequin sheath glittering like the scales of a dragon—his wreath rakishly over one eye.

“Here you are, Jean,” they chorused. “We’ve brought your gown back!”

“I’ll get you sons-of-guns for this,” Walter growled as he squirmed wildly to get free. “I’ll . . . I’ll . . . !” But his good humour was too much for him and he joined in the general merriment. Disrobing Walter in the kitchen, the troops swathed him in Phil’s enormous buffalo coat and off they went—Walter, good-naturedly, taking a terrific ribbing about his “peculiar brand of Parisian *chic*!”

11.

The Plague

Early one morning Brian Burstall dropped in, his face grave. "Little Nadine Griswold is very ill," he told me. "They say it is meningitis!"

"Oh! *no*," I protested, my eyes stinging with sudden tears as I visualized the pretty, doll-like little tot who had wormed her way into all our hearts with her adorable ways and merry laughter. "Surely the diagnosis *must* be wrong!"

"I'm afraid not, Jean," his voice was husky. "It is really a terrible shock to us all."

"But," I was crying, "when did Dr. MacDonald come to this decision?"

"Last night!" his face was grave. "Would you like to accompany me?" He lit a cigarette. "I'm going to see Nona and Aubrey to find if there is anything I can do."

A short time later we reached Griswolds house at the end of the trail to find Aubrey frozen and stricken and poor Nona a complete heart-broken wreck. The next few days were dire. I don't think any one of us really slept. Tragedy had come into our midst, and we must be there to share whatever Fate held for poor Nona and Aubrey, be it good or bad. Almost hourly, it seemed, the police boys, Mickey Ryan and others would report to me. Then, a few days later, Walter Johnson came in early one morning and asked if I had any white silk on hand. "What do

you want it for?" I asked, trembling with a sudden premonition.

"Poor little Nadine passed away an hour or so ago," he said, his eyes misted with tears. "I need it to line the coffin I'm making!"

I was completely stunned, my heart a colossal ache, for I had loved the dear little soul as though she were my own.

During one of the bitterest days of the winter we laid Nadine to rest in the Anglican churchyard. Despite the searing cold and bitter north wind everyone in the settlement was there to pay their last respects, and there were few dry eyes when the tiny grave was covered with sprays and wreaths of fir and spruce, tied with white satin ribbons in lieu of flowers for such is the ingenuity of the Northerner, such the depth of feeling at moments like this, that we could always find a way to surmount whatever difficulty might arise.

Phil was now away on his long winter inspection trip around Great Slave Lake and my mind was constantly with him as the thermometer crept lower and lower. Throughout all my years in the North I never did get used to the thought of his camping in some occasional Indian shack or tepee, spreading his bedroll upon the floor or ground, or of his sleeping out beside a campfire with his men in bitter weather, to arise by five in the morning and hit the trail once again, and I often shuddered as I visualized them travelling through the silent, snow-mushroomed woods in 50° or 60° below zero weather, or over the searing sweep of lake or wide-open tundra, only to make camp again, day after day, night after night, and bolt their food down ere it froze upon their plates, their hands encased in heavy mooseskin

mittens. During these trips I would often be alone for two months or more at a time.

To many people this sort of life has conjured up scenes of romance, of a picturesque, dashing life the equal of which there is none—a life of adventure, *à la Hollywood*, where Adventure ends when the hero walks beyond the range of the camera—and there have been those who have stared at Phil in complete disbelief when he has assured them that *adventure* is merely another name for bad management, or ignorance of conditions. Naturally, as is the case everywhere, emergencies occasionally arise but, by and large, as Phil has frequently remarked: “The man who has adventures on the trail has no business being on the trail. He is not only a menace to himself, but to everyone else around him!”

As a matter of fact, before setting out he would draw up a timetable, allowing for so many days between posts, with a few days to spare either going or coming in case they were delayed upon the trail by a blizzard, or through some unforeseen eventuality cropping up at whatever post he might be at. Added to this, the rations for himself and his men, as well as frozen fish for the dogs, were weighed out to the last ounce, with a little extra added to tide them over whatever unforeseen delay might ensue, for, unlike Jack Hornby, Phil had absolutely no faith, thanks to long and hard-earned experience, in the “he-man” tenet that “living off the country is a cinch”!

The longer I lived in the North the more I realized how right he was for the North of our day was hard and lonely, and it could be cruel. It was no place for weaklings or fools, and it still isn’t despite the advent of the aeroplane and the radio. True, these innovations have facilitated things to a great extent—have proven their worth in many emergencies besides bringing some of the amenities of civilization, so-called, to the Lone Land—

but the North has been the *North* for a long time and such it will remain. No one can afford to take chances. You just don't dare to fool with the gods of the Silent Places!

"I'm leaving at the end of the week for Snowdrift," Brian informed me one evening shortly after Phil had left.

"*Snowdrift!*" I ejaculated, envisioning the solitary outpost on the edge of the Barren Lands which my husband had established not long before. "You'll be lonely as the devil there!"

"I know," he said gravely. "Inspector Trundell is leaving for Fort Resolution on Friday. I'll accompany him that far, then head out for my new digs."

"We'll certainly miss you," I replied with a twinge at my heart. We had been such a close-knit group so long it was almost unbearable to think of a break occurring in our ranks.

The evening before he left I put on a dinner party, which was a great success so far as everyone putting up a front was concerned. Afterwards, I played and sang *Danny Boy* so many times at his request that that song will ever be associated with him in my mind. A few years later he was transferred to Fond du Lac, at the end of Lake Athabaska, where he met an early death under the most tragic of circumstances shortly after taking over the detachment.

When Phil returned from his trip he handed me a couple of dirty moccasin strings from each of which depended ten long, dark objects a foot in length, which resembled mahogany shillelaghs.

"What are these?" I asked.

"Caribou tongues!" he replied.

"They don't look much like caribou tongues to me," I frowned. Glancing up, I caught a sudden gleam of mischief in his eyes. "Is this a joke?" I asked.

"No," he smiled. "You've always wanted to taste this

Northern delicacy so—there you are. They'll be all right when they're cooked."

The following Saturday, when I lifted them from the brine in which they'd been soaked all night, I was amazed. They had shrunk to half their original size and looked exactly as tongues should. When I finally served them I still had a feeling that Phil and the troops, knowing my fastidiousness, were enjoying a joke at my expense. Then the truth came out! The squaws at the Thekulthili Lake camp had been using them as *poker chips*! Having changed hands time and again for over a month they had been stretched completely out of shape. Between times they'd been lying about the tepees; sat upon by the squaws and children, and roamed over by the dogs!

With the advent of spring there came another break in our ranks. This time Corporal Art Blake was slated to return Outside after three years service in the North, and Corporal Woods took over. Again, there was the usual farewell party which ended next day in a dance in Moirie's restaurant at Fort Fitzgerald, where everyone tripped the light fantastic until the sternwheeler, *Athabasca River*, was ready to depart.

At first, Jack was quite bucked over his promotion but, soon, he began to wonder about things. One week later, to the very day—a Wednesday—we were all set to cross the portage to attend another dance at Moirie's. Curling up on a chair on the veranda, I lit a cigarette and waited for Jack to appear. Finally, I noticed a lot of activity around the Hudson's Bay post on the riverbank and saw Jack and Halliday dashing backwards and forwards between the post and the barracks. Realizing something was afoot, that the dancing party was off, I entered the house and went to the kitchen to make a cup of tea. Next second Jack came through the front door.

"Jean!" he called. His voice sounded strange, then I heard him say to someone: "Sit down here, Ed!"

Entering the living-room, I noticed he was as pale as death and Ed Alexander, a fine young chap whom we had met in the Peace River country, also pale and trembling—and covered with blood!

"Oh! Lord . . . what's the matter?" I ejaculated. "Ed . . . are you hurt?"

Unable to reply he just shook his head numbly, tears streaming down his face.

"Bring Ed a drink, Jean," Jack requested. "He's had a terrible shock. He and his father were loading logs on their wagon near the hayfield. One of them slipped . . . Mr. Alexander was on the wrong side . . . he was killed instantly!"

A short while later Jack returned to the barracks and I sat up all night trying to console poor Ed.

"Thank goodness, *that's* over!" remarked Jack as we left the graveyard a couple days later. "I don't want to go through anything like that again!"

But, alas, the Fates had other plans. The following Wednesday Alex Kennedy, an old Cree half-breed friend of my husband who had been a member of the Wolseley Expedition to the Nile in 1884, came tumbling into the house.

"Alex—you frighten me!" I ejaculated as I gazed into his handsome face, now grey and drawn. "What in heaven's name is wrong?"

"It's Ed Martin, the wood-cutter," he stuttered. "I paddled over to give him some fish and have a chat as he is a pretty lonely man. I knocked at his cabin door but got no answer. I couldn't understand it for I'd seen him run into his cabin as I was paddling across the river. I waited a little then I looked through the window. Suddenly there was a loud bang. When the smoke, it's clear,

there's Martin—lying on his bunk with a Winchester between his knees!" Alex covered his face with trembling hands and shuddered.

"Come on," I made for the door. "We'll get Mr. Godsell and go and see Inspector Trundell. This looks like a matter for the Mounted Police!"

By the time Corporals Halliday and Woods reached the river to tune up the outboard motor in the police canoe the bank was lined with a solemn-faced throng. Despite the fact that Alex had come straight to our house to seek my husband; despite the fact that no mention of the tragedy had been made to anyone except the Inspector, my husband and myself, word of it had, *somehow*, leaked out. Once again the *moccasin telegraph* had whispered!

An hour later the boys returned with all that was left of poor old, lonely Ed Martin whose fifteen years of isolation, except for rare visits to get supplies at the post, had caught up with him. So introverted, so *bushed* had he become that he would utter nary a word to anyone but myself—a phenomenon which made everyone wonder. Even whilst shopping he would remain mute, his only means of communicating his needs to the Postmanager being through the medium of a pencilled list. Like a graven image, he would wait till everything was stacked up on the counter of the trading store. Then, after silently paying for his supplies, he would pack them up in a large canvas square, toss it upon his back and head for the river to paddle across to the other side and there to remain in complete and utter isolation for six months—endlessly cutting wood to fulfil his Hudson's Bay contract.

The weather now turned very hot and, for the simple reason that there were not enough men around who were willing to help bury Martin because he was a suicide, the funeral had been postponed and postponed until grim necessity began to dictate the need of immediate action.

Finally, Alex Kennedy dropped in one evening around dinnertime and told Phil he would like him to come right away, that Martin was, at last, to be laid to rest.

An hour later Phil returned—boiling mad. The police had commandeered Jimmy Wise, Fred Yorke, Willie McNeill and one or two other worthies as pallbearers.

However, in order to get into the proper mood for the occasion, they had unearthed a few crocks of John Barleycorn and put on a real celebration. Finally, they piled into Wise's truck and rolled around and around the settlement, howling like banshees and singing ribald songs—all of them so wobbly they couldn't hold themselves up let alone carry a coffin.

"That explains the row I heard a while ago," I remarked. "Tell me—just *when* are they going to get that poor soul buried?"

"He's buried now," Phil replied. "Woods finally went to Government House and corralled Jerry Murphy, Paul Trudell and Bill Champagne and pressed them into service as pallbearers despite their religious beliefs. But, *afterwards*," he laughed despite his anger, "you should have seen Bill Champagne streaking for his church, rosary in hand, as though the devil himself was at his heels!"

About the time we left the North, Judge Lucien Dubuc of Edmonton arranged for an ornate stone in the form of a length of cordwood, and bearing a legend to the prowess of Ed Martin as the best woodcutter in the North, to be erected at the boundary line between Alberta and the Northwest Territories. Who paid for it no one knows. Rumour hath it that it was Martin's *own* money which was used! I also heard, later, that he had left a legacy of some \$6,600 to the Mounted Police.

With this last tragedy Jack's jinx was broken and he

enjoyed the rest of his days at the detachment without further upsets, much to his relief.

Early that summer we entertained two delightful visitors. Doctor, later Sir Frederick, Banting of Insulin fame, and A. Y. Jackson, Canada's outstanding and well-known artist. They were with us for about a week, A. Y., spending a good deal of his time sketching some of the lovely spots around the fort and Fred, cross-legged, on a rug in front of one of our bookcases taking endless notes from my husband's rare volumes of Canadiana. He reminded me more of a happy schoolboy than an outstanding medical celebrity as he browsed through them and found some item of absorbing interest. Incidentally, it may not be generally known but Dr. Banting was also an artist in his own right, and a very talented one too.

As a matter of fact, that summer proved to be an extremely busy one indeed, the house being filled with more visitors than usual, amongst them being our old friend, Johnnie Moran, who was accompanied by Carl Parker of the Indian Department in Ottawa—an ex-Hudson's Bay clerk who had spent a winter with Phil at Pepekwtattooce in the Norway House country many years before—as well as Corporal Alan T. Belcher of the Mounted Police who was *en route* home to Ottawa on leave after a six year sojourn in the Arctic. Tall, handsome, with black curly hair, an engaging personality and all the charm and wit of the Irish, there was never a dull moment when he was around. Added to his innate love of fun and laughter he also possessed a glorious tenor voice and he loved nothing better than a good old-fashioned sing-song around the piano. "It's a good thing, Jean, you haven't any close neighbours," he laughed one night. "They'd certainly lose a lot of beauty sleep when we get rolling!"

The friendship established with Alan that summer has

lasted, like all our other Northern friendships, all through the years and, today, we count him amongst our closest and dearest friends. He retired in September, 1956, with the rank of Deputy Commissioner.

On the day I was preparing a farewell dinner for our visitors I asked John James to keep an eye on the kitchen stove until I returned from the trading store. "There's a roast of pork in the oven," I told him, "and I don't want the fire to go out."

When I returned a short while later I found the range red-hot and the kitchen filled with an ominous sizzling sound. No sooner did I open the oven door than a blinding cloud of smoke smote me in the face. Frightened out of my wits I grasped the dipper, filled it with water and tossed it over the roast. That did it! There was a flash of flame then everything was on fire—even myself. When the excitement was all over I was minus a lot of hair, my arms, hands and face were painfully singed; the charred window curtains were strewn all over the floor where Phil had tossed them, and my lovely white-enamelled walls sported the most hideous pattern of brown and black blisters. I felt absolutely sick! Fire prevention was almost an obsession with Phil, and my tears availed me nothing as he read me a homily on my crass stupidity. "Perhaps this will teach you," he ended, "*never* to throw water on burning grease!" Believe me, I was anything but popular for a while.

Just as the *Distributor* was preparing for her first trip to the Arctic, a couple of the Lafferty boys returned from Edmonton, where they had gone to sell their furs. A few days later they were laid up. Just a cold, they thought, and let it go at that. Hardly, however, had the stern-wheeler commenced to work her way down-river before the Pilot was taken ill and, by the time Phil stepped

ashore at Hay River, half the passengers were down. Then, as the travelling plague spot—which the *Distributor* had become—went cruising on her way she left behind at every post the contaminating germs of the disease. Within twenty-four hours after her departure the entire population of each settlement was prostrated with malignant 'flu.

Hardly had the steamer left Fort Smith than I, too, along with many others, became the victim of the raging epidemic. When I awakened next morning one of the Sisters from the Grey Nuns Hospital was bending over me, sponging my face with tepid water and watching me with worried eyes.

"What's wrong?" I asked weakly.

"You have a very bad dose of the 'flu," she said softly. "You must stay in bed for at least a couple of weeks. And, whatever you do," her tone was serious, "don't attempt to get up. You are really ill!"

"Oh! Lord," I groaned, "what a mess! Phil's away! Who on earth will look after me?"

But I needn't have worried. Ere the sister left I overheard Christine McPherson and Agnes Mercredi, Rosa's sister, arguing hotly downstairs as to which of them was going to nurse me. Peace was restored when the sister arranged for Agnes to look after me during the night since she was the younger, and for Christine to take over during the day. For a while it was touch and go with me but I was much too ill to care. However, I was in good hands. With the kindly sister, Agnes, Christine, Joe Lanouette, the police boys, and Mickey Ryan, who drove over from the Halfway every morning to see me, I lacked for nothing in the way of care.

Whilst all the afflicted whites finally recovered, the swift and savage scourge claimed a terrible rate of mortality amongst the poor natives. It gave little or no

warning. One minute they would be chatting and laughing—fifteen or twenty minutes later they were dead! Thus, day after day, as I lay on my sick bed, I had the distressing experience of hearing the doleful tolling of the mission bell as funeral after funeral passed the house from early morning till evening; the cries and lamentations of the bereaved sounding like the wails of the damned in my ears.

Down-river the scourge continued unabated until it finally spent its force in the Mackenzie Delta. At Fort Reliance, on the edge of the Barren Lands, the story was the same whilst, at Fort Rae, Corporal Halliday and Constable Jack Emerson found a Yellow-knife village deserted, with thirty starving dogs left behind. When they made a patrol to Goulet's camp at the Gros Cap they discovered twenty-six Indians had died of the plague, the seven survivors having fled in panic. Meanwhile, Constable R. C. (Bob) Gray made a patrol from Fort Resolution to Stoney Island to find nine more dead. The toll had been terrific!

However, there is seldom a situation so serious that it doesn't have its lighter side. At Fort Resolution a native named Clawhammer became the self-appointed coffin-maker. So busy was he that, armed with a long stick, he would dash into a cabin or teepee, slip the stick alongside the body of some unfortunate then cut a notch to denote the length of the "wooden overcoat." Hurriedly entering one cabin he proceeded, as usual, to measure an old Indian. "What for you do dat?" the sick man groaned.

"Just measuring you for your coffin!" he grinned.

"But . . ." the native's eyes were popping, "*I'm not dead yet!*"

"You *will* be by the time I've got the coffin ready!" chuckled the irrepressible Clawhammer.

With a roar of anger the Indian rose from his blanket like a jack-in-a-box and chased the "friendly undertaker" out. *That* redskin recovered! I guess his anger started his adrenal glands working, thus saving him from the grim fate of so many of his kin!

I had been up and around for about two weeks and was feeling more like myself again when I began to notice how anxious everybody was to find out if I had heard from Phil. At first I paid little attention. Merely relegated their inquiries to the realms of idle curiosity. When, however, Inspector Trundell and the troops began to look worried *I* began to ask questions, only to be brushed off with an—"Oh! we just wondered."

Finally, one Sunday morning, Woods and the boys dropped in with Ed Callaghan and one or two others to repeat the same old question.

"What is this all about?" I demanded, gazing at the circle of anxious faces.

"Mrs Godsell . . . Mrs. Godsell . . . !" A shrill, piping voice blasted the silence then Rowan MacDonald's young son catapulted into the house like a bolt from the blue, his chest heaving with excitement. "Mrs. Godsell . . ." he was puffing breathlessly, "you husbum's home . . . de *Gitche Okemow* . . . him come *right now!*"

"Thank God!" The exclamation burst involuntarily from every lip.

A second later Phil breezed in, a wide grin bisecting his face. "So!" he chuckled, "you've got scouts out now to keep you posted on my arrival."

"You old son-of-a-gun," Woods tried to look severe, "*you've* had scouts out looking for you. Where have you been?"

Phil laughed. Then, within seconds, I learned the reason for all the anxiety.

On his trip across Great Slave Lake to Fort Rae he and

his crew had pulled into an Indian camp to find every inmate, including the dogs, stone dead—all victims of the 'flu epidemic—the medicine man still with his drum in his hand. Burying the bodies, they had sailed on to Fort Rae. Completing his inspection of the post the party then headed back for Fort Resolution aboard his little schooner, the *Fort Rae*, only to disappear completely.

When day followed day without the schooner showing up at Fort Resolution, Constable Bob Gray and the rest of the Mounties there sent out a patrol to Fort Rae, only to learn that Phil had left there three weeks before. Returning, they wirelessly to Inspector Trundell that the schooner and crew were missing, and that they were awaiting orders from him to set out on still another patrol when Phil and the party turned up—much to everyone's relief.

What had happened after their departure from Fort Rae was this. A devastating attack of the plague had struck everybody aboard the vessel. One of the crew died and they buried him on an island behind which the *Fort Rae* was riding out a wicked storm. Intending to follow the north shore, then cut across the open lake, via Hardisty Island, at its widest stretch, the crippled crew were sailing along when, without warning, the propeller was jerked off as the vessel fouled a submerged rock. Dependent now on sails alone they lay becalmed for nearly two weeks until dwindling rations forced them to subsist on a single hardtack biscuit apiece per day. At length, with intermittent puffs of wind, they succeeded in tacking the reluctant schooner across the lake until, sick, hungry and exhausted, they at last rounded Moose Island and pulled into Fort Resolution, where a new propeller was affixed to the shaft.

No wonder the boys had been anxious! As they admitted later, everyone had thought that Phil and his schooner were at the bottom of Great Slave Lake!

12.

Hail! and Farewell

One day, in January, 1929, word was received at Fort Smith that Captain "Punch" Dickins of the Western Canada Airways would arrive by aeroplane around 2 p.m., with the first airborne supplies and mail for the residents of Fort Fitzgerald and Fort Smith. It was bitterly cold—the thermometer registering somewhere around 60° below zero—and I was luxuriating in the warmth of the crackling stove when Jack Woods entered, the breast of his *ahtegi* like an icy shield with the intense frost.

"Get your duds on," he said. "We're going down to welcome the plane!"

"Oh! no *we're* not," I contradicted. "You are going but—not me. It is far too cold to even stick one's nose outside the door!"

Without a word he went to the hall and returned with my *mukluks* and *parki*. "P. H., and the Inspector are away," he remarked quietly. "This is a history-making event. I have to represent the O.C., and it's your duty, as wife of the head official of the Company, to take his place."

I acquiesced with ill grace and started out, swearing that I would only freeze my toes. "I've frozen them already," I grumbled. But all he did was grin and race beside me down the steep bank towards the river.

Sure enough! Despite my duffle-socks and *mukluks* both my big toes were frozen by the time we reached the

Northern Trader's warehouse on the riverbank. By the time the plane zoomed in for a landing on the strip cleared on the ice¹ I was not in the most gracious mood. When the famous "Punch" stepped down from the cockpit, I was pretty fed up. To my amazement, he haughtily brushed aside every introduction, and a tense silence descended upon the group assembled nearby, who had come prepared to extend the usual Northern welcome to the stranger within the gates. It was a bad moment!

"Let's go, Jack," I said quietly. "I argued with you about coming down—something told me not to. However, when I got here, I was prepared to observe the amenities and invite the gentleman up to the house for dinner. Now, I've changed my mind."

Not unnaturally Jack, too, was annoyed. As a member of the Mounted Police, as Inspector Trundell's deputy, he was certainly entitled to courteous treatment but, unfortunately, "Punch" seemed to be unaware of what the situation demanded. Thus the "history-making" event started off on a very sour note indeed.

"This is the end of the *Old North*," I remarked to Jack as we climbed back up the bank. "The end of the peace and quiet as well as the isolation. The waves of civilization are breaking over our heads—nothing can save us. Personally, I don't like it!"

For many there was, however, a thrill in getting in things by 'plane instead of waiting for the sternwheeler after break-up. Mrs. Dexter at the Wireless station thought so too, until she asked "Punch" to bring her in an egg-beater to replace the one she'd broken. She nearly fainted when it was landed at Fort Smith. The cost was *fifteen dollars!*

¹My husband had arranged to have this strip cleared, along with others at the down-river posts, in advance of the arrival of the Western Canada Airways planes.

However, it was the beginning of a new era, the first crack in the opening-up of that vast and lonely region wherein the Fur Lords had held undisputed sway from time immemorial, a region wherein more animal trails than human bisected the silent forests and the frigid reaches of the Polar spaces.

When, in 1921, Captain Gorman and Elmer Fullerton cracked-up the two Imperial Oil planes at Fort Simpson through trying to land on the bumpy Mission field so that Sergeant "Nitchie" Thorne, returning from Edmonton, could make a grandstand landing right at the back door of the barracks in order to surprise his wife, every old-timer in the land swore by the beard of the Prophet that such "white man's contraptions" were foolish—the North just had no place for such things! The old-time canoe and dog-team had long since proven their worth—so . . . why change?

However, change was in the offing, and it made such rapid strides that, soon, we were depending more and more upon the benefits and blessings this new mode of transportation was bringing into our hitherto isolated existence. And, to give "Punch" Dickins his due, he proved to be an intrepid flyer, one of that outstanding band of pioneer bush pilots who blazed new sky-trails from civilization to the Polar Sea, engraving for all time their names upon the pages of history.

When, in April, Phil's red-painted *carriole* swung into the fort and pulled up before the house to a canine aria which denoted that even the huskies knew they had reached the end of another long trail, he told of having met a very worried Inspector Trundell at Fort Resolution.

As a matter of fact, for some considerable time speculation had been rife throughout the land regarding the long silence that had followed Jack Hornby's latest

exploit. Two years before, in the summer of 1927, Hornby had returned from a visit to England in company with his eighteen-year-old cousin, Edgar Vernon Christian, and a young school teacher named Harold Challoner Evan Adlard—both of whom had been thrilled to the very core by Jack's stories of his life of adventure in the Barren Lands. During the few days they remained around Fort Fitzgerald and Fort Smith there was a good deal of angry talk when it was learned that Hornby was still expounding his theory that he could live off the country because there would be lots of caribou around, and was, as always, taking no more than his usual meagre amount of supplies.

"That bird should be penned-up in a cage," growled Jack McLellan. "He's a menace to everyone. Supposing he should become ill, or meet with a serious accident, what is going to happen to these two young chaps? They don't know the first thing about life in this country—*don't even know the country*—yet, here they are, trusting Hornby as though he was the Almighty! In the past," Jack's face was distorted with anger, "he's only had himself to look after, but this is a very different matter. Unless he takes in some extra supplies to tide them over a possible emergency something should be done to stop the stupid devil!"

An opinion that was heartily shared by every old-timer in the land!

Late that summer a band of Yellow-knife Indians paddled their bark canoes into Fort Resolution and told of having come across the Hornby party at Pike's Portage, near Artillery Lake. They were already out of tobacco, they said, and their food supplies, as far as they could see, had been reduced to a twenty-five-pound sack of flour and a small quantity of tea. Accustomed, as they were, to lean living, the Indians had warned Hornby that he was taking foolish chances but he had merely laughed,

pointed to the guns and ammunition, and told them everything would be all right—*there would be plenty of caribou around!*

By fall fur was booming again, and the North soon lost interest in them, all the traders and trappers being busy with their own affairs. All, that is, except my husband who, through long experience and force of habit, had continued to make inquiries about them at all the posts, Indian camps and cabins he visited whilst travelling around Great Slave Lake—but without success. The party had simply disappeared from human ken!

Finally, rumours of all kinds swept the North. Hornby had worked his way overland and gone home to England via Hudson Bay! He had arrived at Chesterfield Inlet the previous summer and taken the Company's ship back to England! Three bodies had been sighted by Hudson Bay Eskimos upon an ice-floe out at sea! Then passengers aboard the *Athabasca River* brought word that he had settled on a fruit farm in British Columbia, having left the North for good!

However, despite these rumours, my husband remained convinced that the party had met disaster, and expressed such views to Inspector Trundell. "Since these men were not equipped to spend two winters in the Barrens," he told him, "I think it would be a good idea if you sent out a patrol. Thanks to this warm spring weather, they'd be able to make long days by dog-team with a minimum of equipment and inconvenience!"

Later, when Inspector Trundell returned to Fort Smith, we learned that Corporal R. A. Williams had been thwarted by the mutinous behavior of his Indian guides, whom he was unable to handle. Reaching Hornby's old cabin on the Casba, he was forced to return to Fort Reliance without having accomplished anything.

It is said that in spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love. Perhaps this is what afflicted Pat Brown when he suddenly decided to put on a bang-up dance and wedding feast at Joe Lanouette's and "aisle it to the altar" with the simpering Helen Berens. Not one whit deterred by the fact that he was already the father of a seven-year-old son by the blushing bride, he promptly ordered a white silk bridal dress, with all the trimmings, to be shipped in by air for his intended, and went at the preparations with a will. Money, of course, was necessary for the occasion—and Pat was broke! But, with the characteristic resourcefulness of his red brothers, he was not to be deterred. His first move to replenish his exchequer was to sell Billy Cooke, the Company's trader, and a former opposition man, ten beaver skins for two hundred and fifty dollars which, he explained, were still in the bush! If he had wished to be a little *more* explicit he might have added that the skins in question were *still* on the backs of perambulating beavers which, he *hoped*, would eventually step into his traps!

Around nine o'clock, when the usual volley of gunfire shattered the silence to denote the dance was about to start, we made our way across the fort, having as a matter of policy to be present at such affairs, and entered Joe's restaurant, now packed with a milling, jostling throng. Everywhere one looked the eye was met with virginal-white wedding bells and miles of paper streamers. Atop a small table swathed in white tulle, and adorned with enormous paper chrysanthemums, reposed an ornate wedding cake. Nearby stood the happy pair, Helen in her bridal finery, with black oxfords and brown woollen stockings on her feet and legs, and a gleaming "diamond" tiara sloped over her forehead, smiling happily at her groom—now resplendent in fancy beaded moccasins,

brass-studded leathern cuffs, brilliant cerise neckerchief and a blue serge suit. In the left lapel he sported a gigantic white-paper Mum.

“‘ow you lak, *Madame*?” Joe’s eyes were dancing with mirth as he pointed to the gleaming white cake. “I’m wan for ‘ave pink roses roun’ de middle but dat ‘*virgin*’—she wan’ everyt’ing *white*!” His voice rose in shrill, raucous laughter as he disappeared towards the kitchen.

No sooner had the fiddlers tuned up than a bevy of silk and tartan-clad beauties, each with a “diamond” tiara atop their raven locks, and reeking of *eau de Woolworth*, paired off with their prancing partners. The fun was fast and furious. As the hours slipped by coats and sweaters were jettisoned by the perspiring dancers, and tiaras sat rakishly in every direction on the ladies’ heads as the boisterous throng thumped and pounded their bibulous way through the usual Northern dances, whilst the air grew thick with tobacco smoke, to say nothing of the redolent aroma of lemon and vanilla extracts—and Listerine!

“So much for prohibition in Indian territory.” Phil chuckled as we made our way back to the house. “At least we won’t have to worry about germs for a few days. This has been an honest-to-goodness prophylactic party!”

“It’s certainly hell what civilization can do to these Indians!” I shook my head.

With the advent of the aeroplane there disappeared another picturesque phase of Northern life. No longer did the mail *coureurs*—those unsung heroes of the long white trails—bend in the teeth of Keewatin, God of the North Wind, or fight searing blizzards and bitter cold for days or weeks on end to get the mail through. No longer did we search the frozen surface of lake or river with hungry eyes for the first glimpse of their dog-teams

as they rounded the shoreline or some forested bend. No longer did we speed down to the post, excited and news-hungry, to welcome them and await impatiently until our letters were sorted out, then scan them with avid eyes, a thousand times, until every word was graven on our minds, for the very mechanical make-up of the plane, in itself, bred an indifference that was almost as unfeeling as the metal it was composed of.

Whilst, to the whites, this change ultimately became just "one of those things" it proved almost too much for the acquisitive souls of the mahogany-faced ladies of the Lone Land who were, by now, endeavouring to ape the ways of their white sisters. When mail order catalogues, upon whose pages appeared in gay and attractive colours all the latest things the local white women were wearing, finally flooded the country they were treated more reverently than Bibles. Here was the open sesame to a veritable Aladdin's cave wherein reposed all the baubles and luxuries the female soul has craved since time began.

Soon ancient crones and giddy flappers were pouring avidly over them. They didn't even have to have the money, the convent-raised girls who were filling out the orders told them. All they had to do was fill out the form bearing the magic legend "C.O.D." and leave the rest to fate and the mail order house. So, they filled out forms galore for themselves and for those who could not write and sent them on their way. Heaven, they maintained, could never be like this!

When the next air-mail arrived Paul Trudell, the Postmaster at Fort Smith, gazed in stupefaction at the mountain of parcels by which he was surrounded, each marked "C.O.D." and addressed to Dora Ratfat, Elsie Lane-Duck, Mary Dry Meat, Marie Chandelle, Rosalie Squirrel and many other fantastically-named ladies of the wilderness.

Then, one by one, they appeared at the wicket, their dusky faces wreathed in smiles which soon turned to black anger when they found they could not take the parcels off *in debt*, as was the case with the trading stores. From house to house, from store to store they went, pleading plaintively for the loan of anywhere from ten to sixty dollars. They would, they said, make moccasins, wash clothes, in fact—do almost anything at some distant and very indefinite date *if only they could get the cash* to obtain the coveted parcels from that blankety-blank *muchistim*, Paul, who was withholding what was rightfully their own. For a while I had a very bitter enemy in Elizabeth Mercredi when I turned down her offer to *scrub* for me if I would only lend her eighty dollars!

Naturally, most of the parcels went back, but others came in on the next plane; still more came in on the steamer, and it was quite some time ere the mail order houses realized that Marie Chandelle, Rosalie Squirrel, Elsie Lane-Duck, *et al*, were not, despite their substantial orders, the type of customers they desired.

Added to this comedy of the backwoods, the catalogues also taught the dusky belles a few tricks in beauty treatment. Half-breed and Indian girls now bobbed their hair in imitation of the whites, only to be referred to as “buffalo heads” by the less advanced of their kind who refused to be high-hatted, and a lovely free-for-all broke out one Sunday morning between the Berens and Bourke girls upon the steps of the Catholic Mission—both Mounted Police and priests being forced to take a hand in parting the dusky combatants.

In her little store, Mrs. Conibear was doing a flourishing business with these same girls in bath salts, rouge and other such luxuries—including white face powder which altered the pigmentation of their skin and turned their faces a ghastly bluish hue. Only once was Mrs. Conibear

nonplussed and that was when the trim but dusky *demi-mondaine*, Alice Berens, tripped mincingly into the store in French-heeled shoes and drawlingly asked in a pseudo-English accent for a "Jar of *Varnishing Cream*!" Skin bleach also had a great vogue, and I'll never forget the morning Elizabeth Mercredi entered our kitchen and set a dozen empty jars on the table, at the same time placing her tawny arm against mine.

"*Wah! Wah!* Mrs. Godsell," she ejaculated. "*Look!* Dat damn stuff no good. . . I'm usc all dem jars an' my skin . . . 'stead o' being white like yours," she jumped in fury, "is still lak damn black Injun's!"

Once again the river broke up with the customary thunderous cannonading.

Once again the woods were filled with the silvery trickle of water and the arias of the befeathered coloraturas now winging up from the south. And, once again, the white-painted sternwheelers plowed their way northward with supplies and trading outfits for the new season, as well as the inevitable lot of summer visitors.

One broiling afternoon, while the visitors were still wandering around the fort, I carried our collapsible rubber bath tub down to the kitchen for a quick dip, and was luxuriating in the relaxing effect of tepid water when I was startled by a resounding knock on the front door. Remembering that I had locked it, I settled back again in the tub. There came another knock, followed by crunching footsteps without. Glancing through one of the windows, I noticed the tall, robust form of Bishop Stringer streaking around the house with the timorous, dwarf-like Reverend Gibson mincing daintily in his wake. In quick succession the Bishop's fist pounded a tattoo on the back door.

"You'll never get in here, sonny boy," I murmured to

myself. "This is *one* time you'll find a Northerner's door locked!"

Bang! BANG! Again he pounded. Then, to my horror, ere I could dash for cover the door opened wide and I gazed into the startled eyes of the reverend gentleman.

"Oh! Lord!" I exclaimed. Sliding deeper into the water, covering myself with my hands, and all the *savoir faire* I could muster under the circumstances, I stammered: "I . . . I thought I'd locked that silly door!"

The words were no sooner spoken than the overly-agitated Reverend Gibson came out of his momentary trance, took to his heels and bolted. *I have never seen him since!*

"I'm sorry I can't stand up," I giggled, puffing as nonchalantly as I could upon my cigarette.

"So am I." There was a merry twinkle in the Bishop's eyes as he discreetly retired and closed the door behind him. A twinkle which was always there when, years later, we used to see him in Winnipeg.

Hardly had the ice gone out in the Slave River than Inspector Trundell started out in a grey-painted Peterborough canoe with Corporal Williams and a Slavey guide and headed for Fort Reliance at the east end of Great Slave Lake on still another attempt to solve the mystery of the missing Hornby party. Picking up Constable Kirk at Fort Reliance they paddled and portaged under the torrid summer sun, crossing Artillery Lake and pushing up the Hanbury River towards the distant Thelon where, it was rumoured, Hornby had intended to establish his camp since it was reported to be good caribou country.

"I thought I knew what flies were," the Inspector told me later, "but I hadn't the slightest idea until I made that

trip into the Barrens. The work of portaging was made sheer torture by them!"

At last, on July 5, a stand of dwarf spruce broke the desolation of the Barrens, the first sign of trees they had seen for days. "Look!" shouted Kirk. "A cabin in the timber!"

Beaching the canoe, they leapt ashore and closed-in on the tumble-down, rotting cabin, goal of eighteen months persistent effort. A moment later they were gazing upon a sight that chilled the marrow in their bones. Stretched at full length upon the ground lay two dead men—Jack Hornby and Harold Adlard!

Silently, they entered the little cabin. Upon a narrow, spruce-wood bed lay young Christian in the sleep that knows no awakening—the eighteen-year old lad who had looked forward with such keen anticipation to a life of adventure beyond the frontier!

The pitiful bareness of that little cabin told all too plainly its own tragic story of discouragement and want. The complete absence of caribou skins was, in itself, significant to men who knew their North. So, too, were those gnawed and polished bones upon the floor. Rifles there were, and ammunition aplenty, but not a scrap of food save a small quantity of tea. The caribou had failed them!

With that perversity that characterizes their movements, the caribou had failed to follow their customary paths of migration and had not come near the cabin. Day after day, month after month, they had waited in vain for the thunder of countless hooves and the trembling of the earth that would presage the great autumn caribou migration. Then winter, with its awful cold and biting blizzards, had swept down upon them when their larder was empty. In utter desperation they had dug up old bones and bits of discarded skin and offal thrown out in

the fall, gnawed the bones to a polish, and boiled the putrid skins to extract a little nourishment.

In simple, poignant words those last days of awful suffering were told in the diaries and letters young Christian had left behind. Jack Hornby had died on the night of April 16, 1928, and Christian had written in his diary: "April 17, 1 o'clock. At 6.45 last evening poor Jack passed peacefully away. Until that minute I think I remained the same, but then I was a wreck." Two weeks later poor Harold Adlard followed him to the Happy Hunting Grounds.

To Edgar Christian, the youngest member of the expedition, death had not come mercifully. For weeks he had lived beside the dead bodies of his companions, watching the warm breath of summer revitalizing the Barren Lands; listening to ducks and geese winging by overhead, and watching elusive caribou grazing beyond gunshot. Exhibiting in his awful loneliness a magnificent courage deserving a more fitting reward than an untimely death.

"Please don't blame dear Jack. Ever loving and thankful to you for all a dear Mother is to a boy and has been to me," he wrote then, feeling the inertia of approaching end, he had hidden the Will and diaries beneath the ashes of the stove and laid down on his wooden bunk to die. Christian by name—*christian* to the end!

Burying the bodies in properly marked graves, the patrol collected their few belongings and headed back to Fort Smith. The last chapter in this rash drama of the snows was closed! As I write, I have before me the memorial brochure sent my husband in 1939 by Mr. James W. Mills of Dover College, which young Christian had attended, thanking him for his assistance in the search, and for his kindness in furnishing information which filled in gaps in the diaries.

Times were now rapidly changing. This "New" North was vastly different from the Old North I had entered as a bride nine years before. The steel tentacles of the Alberta and Great Waterways Railway—still known to Northerners as the *Muskeg Limited*—had bitten their way deeper through forest, muskeg and tamarac swamps to rear the frontier town of Waterways and tap the arterial highways—the Athabasca, the Slave and Mackenzie rivers—that stretched northward, two thousand miles, like a silver chain dotted with emerald jewels until they reached the forlorn fastnesses of the Western Arctic, bringing the North ever nearer to the canker we call "civilization" and, with it, hordes of irresponsible free traders and white trappers.

Daily, the frontier railroad had crept nearer to the junction of the Clearwater and Athabasca—Peter Pond's Elk River—with potentialities unlooked for by the factors of the fur companies and the copper-skinned tribes that still roamed the forest unmolested. Along those mighty rivers, walled by billowing greenery and age-old conifers, the sons of Pierre and François and Baptiste, erstwhile *voyageurs* who mastered a world their ancestors had unlocked a century and a half before, had already forsaken toilsome York-boat oars to become traders, trappers and dog-runners. Soon, like dethroned monarchs stripped of their power and reduced to the level of other mortals, the so-called "Fur Lords," who had ruled so long with undisputed sway at their picketed trading posts, would be living on the memories of the past, while *Métis* trappers and de-Indianized red men would be haunting the doors of the Mounted Police barracks and Indian agencies for a handout of the white man's bounty to keep starvation from their hearths—virtual outcasts in their native land.

The long and colourful Fur Trade that had endured on down the centuries appeared to be fast building-up to

an unforeseen crisis, with the caribou, the fur-bearing animals and the game but a memory. At long last the gateway to the Northland had been thrown open to all comers, dispelling forever the isolation that had permitted the domination of the fur traders. To those of perception the writing was already plainly written in the rusted rails that bridged the muskegs to the end-of-steel and in the scattering of nondescript adventurers, trappers, prospectors and foreign-born traders who floated down-river in canoes, *batteaux*, scows and other craft until they were to be encountered in the farthest reaches of the land.

Whilst I was busy packing in preparation for our departure from Fort Smith, Inspector Trundell called. "I have dropped in," he said, "to tell you how very sorry I am to learn that you are leaving us. I only wish all the other women in the country were like you. It would be heaven," he smiled. "You have always minded your own business—and never indulged in gossip. Instead, you have brought so much of brightness and good cheer into the lives of us all that you are going to be greatly missed and I wish to extend, on behalf of the Force and myself, deepest appreciation and thanks for your never-ending kindnesses."

My eyes misted with tears at his kindly words. What greater praise, I wondered, could any woman wish for?

It was a good life and, as my mind wanders back, I realize more fully with the passing of time just *how* good it was, and how colourful. We shared our joys and sorrows; we could sit in silence with a friend, sharing the glory of the Northland's kaleidoscopic twilights in a communion which needed no sound as the setting sun bid the land good-night. In the mad cacophony of our

supersonic era, with its increasing din, I often long for the luxury of peace and silence the woods afforded.

With the passing of the years many of our friends have taken the Long Traverse but, to those of us who are left behind, their memory will ever remain green. Each and every one stood out, stark and alone, on his own pinnacle for opening up the Northland, and pushing back the frontier, was a job for individualists. May their shadows never grow less!

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